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Nick Carter Stories

AN UNSOLVED MYSTERY
or Nick Carter's Government Case

NICK CARTER STORIES

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AN UNSOLVED MYSTERY;

Or, NICK CARTER'S GOVERNMENT CASE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A SECRET CONFERENCE.

The old gentleman passed the other two as if they were strangers. He jostled by them without so much as a glance. The most observing person in the throng then pouring out of the railway station, like a swarm of busy bees out of a colossal hive, would have detected no relation between them.

While passing the couple, nevertheless, the old gentleman said quickly to one of them, though scarce above his breath:

"Go to the new Willard. Register as directed, and get a suite. Wait there till I come."

The man addressed heard him, but did not turn his head, nor evince the fact with the slightest change of countenance.

His companion, a natty, keen-eyed chap with a blond mustache twirled upward at the ends à la kaiser, appeared oblivious to what had occurred.

The scene of this trivial episode, which was far more portentous than one would suppose, having a bearing on no less tremendous an issue than the possible fate of a nation, was the new Union Station in the city of Washington, and the hour was two o'clock one fine afternoon in October.

The old gentleman hastened out with the throng into Massachusetts Avenue, seeking a trolley car and mingling with the crowd in a plebian sort of a way, as if business of no great importance had brought him to the nation's capital.

He rode down Pennsylvania Avenue as far as Fourteenth Street, where he alighted and walked the remaining distance to the Treasury Building, entering one of the side doors with an air and display of interest often observed in the crowds of tourists to be seen in this vast building at that hour of the day. No observer would have supposed him other than a sight-seeing stranger, viewing Uncle Sam's great money box and financial institution for the first time in his life.

Something like five minutes later, nevertheless, he entered one of the numerous offices without the ceremony of knocking, and blandly addressed a clerk who turned from his desk to see who had entered.

"I suppose Chief Welden is inside?" he said inquiringly.

"Yes, sir," bowed the clerk. "I will take in your card, or name, if——"

"Don't trouble," interrupted the old gentleman, smiling. "I am his uncle. He is expecting me. I will go right in."

He did not wait for an objection, had any been forthcoming, but opened a near door and walked into an adjoining private office. It was quite large and elaborately furnished. But the only occupant was an attractive, clean-cut man seated at a large, roll-top desk.

"Don't rise, Welden," said the old gentleman, after closing the door. "Have a look at my card. It will supply the needed link. Eyen you are not likely to recognize me."

Chief Welden, then the head of the United States secret service, glanced at the card the speaker displayed for a moment and then coolly returned to his own pocket.

It bore the name of the celebrated New York detective—Nick Carter.

Chief Welden laughed.

"Gracious!" said he, pointing to a chair with one hand and extending the other. "No, indeed; I would not recognize you. You're the limit, Nick, when it comes to giving one a surprise. Why did you come in this rig?"

"A summons direct from the nation's chief executive, Welden, must be occasioned by something of vast importance," Nick replied, drawing up a chair and cordially shaking hands with the treasury official. "It imposes cor-

responding circumspection upon one of my vocation. I decided to drop in here under cover and learn what is wanted of me."

"I knew that the president had communicated with you and I was expecting you to show up during the day," said Chief Welden, more gravely.

"I got the special-delivery letter this morning."

"When did you arrive?"

"Half an hour ago."

"Alone?"

"As you see," said Nick evasively.

Chief Welden swung round in his swivel chair, so as to directly face the noted detective. There had been other times when the keen and clever men under his direction had been baffled by perplexing problems, resulting in an appeal to the famous New York detective; but judging from Welden's expression at that moment, none could have been more important than that which had occasioned this summons of Nick Carter to Washington, an appeal direct from the president himself.

"I will tell you as briefly as possible what has occurred, Nick, and why it has been thought wise to employ you," said Welden.

"Do so," bowed the detective.

"To begin with, Carter, we have in the war department a young man named Harold Garland. He is about thirty, remarkably gifted along certain lines, and strictly reliable. Understand that at the outset; his integrity is above suspicion. I am absolutely sure of that."

"Very good," said Nick. "What about him?"

"He is a graduate from West Point, and is in the employ of the government as an expert engineer, in which capacity he is, as I have said, remarkably gifted. He unquestionably is without a peer in this country in his special line. He has an office in the war department, and I will presently send for him."

"I shall be glad to meet him," Nick observed.

"Now, to go back a little," Chief Welden continued. "Something like eight months ago, Nick, I was informed by two of our secret-service agents abroad that foreign spies were known to be in Washington, said to be here on some secret mission, the nature of which was not definitely known. It was suspected, nevertheless, that they were here after information concerning elaborate coast defenses and fortifications contemplated by the government, which in some sections are under secret construction."

"You received that information eight months ago?"

"Yes."

"Were the reports verified? Were the spies identified?"

"Neither," said Welden. "The suspicion could not be confirmed either here or abroad. The fact that the same report came at about the same time from two of our foreign agents, one then located in Vienna and the other in Paris, and there having been no communication between them, led me to give considerable credit to their report, much more than if there had been but one."

"I see the point," Nick nodded.

"We were not able to verify it, nevertheless, nor have we since succeeded in doing so. Nor have our agents abroad been able to add to the meager information obtained at the time. Under such circumstances, of course, having no confirmation of their reports, the matter became a little stale after eight months."

"Naturally," Nick allowed.

"But it was brought up again very vividly three days ago," Chief Welden pointedly added.

"How so?"

"I will explain in a nutshell."

"I'm all attention."

"For nearly a year, now, Garland has been collaborating with Captain Arthur Backas, a naval officer now stationed in Annapolis, and who also is a recognized expert along engineering lines."

"I know him by name," Nick bowed.

"For the past year these two government engineers have been secretly and exclusively at work on plans for elaborate coast-line defenses and fortifications extending from Chesapeake Bay to Sandy Hook. It is one section of a vast and for the most part secret coast-defense system contemplated by the government, and the first steps in the construction of which have already been taken."

"I follow you, Welden."

"And you know, of course, that secrecy is one of the absolute requirements in such work," Chief Welden proceeded. "There is no occasion for me to enlarge upon that. Secrecy is imperative to adequate protection. If other nations were to learn——"

"I know all about that, Welden," Nick interposed, checking him with a gesture. "It goes without saying. Come to the point."

"That may be done with few words," Chief Welden replied. "Last Friday, three days ago, Garland had occasion to confer with Captain Backas about a very important part of their mutual plans, and he went to Annapolis for that purpose."

"I see."

"He took the plans with him in a leather portfolio. He spent most of the day with Captain Backas, returning alone to Washington in the early evening. He was met at the Union Station by two young women, one the only daughter of Senator Barclay, the other a Miss Verona Warren, an intimate friend of Miss Barclay, and with whom Garland is deeply in love. The girls knew he was to arrive from Annapolis at seven o'clock, and they met him with Senator Barclay's touring car, driven by his chauffeur. They at once took Garland to his apartments, where they dropped him and returned home."

"Garland, I infer, brought back the plans taken to Annapolis," Nick observed.

"He put them in the portfolio before leaving the office in which he had talked with Captain Backas. Their conference had been strictly private. The portfolio did not leave Garland's hands from that time until he entered his apartments in the Grayling, where he has a safe in which to lock them. He opened the portfolio to inclose a memorandum relating to the plans—and found them gone."

"The plans?"

"Yes. The portfolio contained, instead, a quantity of blank paper resembling them in size and thickness."

"I disagree with you," said Nick, after listening with scarce a change of countenance. "You have made one wrong statement."

"Namely?"

"You said the portfolio did not leave Garland's hands after he had placed the plans in it," said Nick. "It did leave them, Welden, or there could not have been a substitution of worthless paper for such tremendously important plans."

Chief Welden smiled and nodded.

"That goes without saying," he admitted. "As a matter of fact, Nick, it was not the same portfolio."

"The whole business had been substituted?"

"Exactly. The substituted portfolio was so like his own, however, that he did not detect the difference until after he had opened it," said Welden. "His own was nearly new and his name was written with ink on the inside of a flap that closes it, and which is secured with two small straps and buckles. There was no name in the substituted portfolio. It was slightly defaced, moreover, so like his own that he detected no difference."

"Which plainly denotes that whoever turned the trick, or planned and directed the job, was perfectly familiar with Garland's portfolio," said Nick.

"That is obvious, of course," Chief Welden agreed.

Nick Carter took up the matter as if it were merely a petty theft, instead of one threatening the nation. No need to tell him, nevertheless, of the terrible danger from further construction in accord with the stolen plans, or of the vast expense and innumerable difficulties in changing them, they presumably having been made to the best advantages discernible to the expert government engineers in charge of that part of the work. One scarce could conceive of a more serious and possibly far-reaching loss.

Nick gazed at Chief Welden for a moment, then asked tersely:

"Any clew?"

"None, so far," was the reply.

"You suspect it was the work of the spies mentioned?"

"Naturally."

"Who is on the case?"

"Several of my best men," said Welden. "I have talked with the president, who is much disturbed by the matter, and we realize that these men may be known by sight and that they are connected with the secret service. We have thought wise, therefore, to employ you on the case, assuming that you are not known and can work to greater advantage. There is this much to it, Carter," he forcibly added: "Those plans must be recovered. They must be found before copies can be made, or——"

"One moment," Nick interposed. "I appreciate all that is involved. It is bad, terribly bad, but I will do my best to meet the situation. Send for Garland. I wish to question him."

"I think I can answer any questions that——"

"You won't do," Nick again interrupted. "I might ask questions that you could not possibly answer. I shall want them answered. Send for Garland. I wish to talk with him."

Chief Welden turned to his desk and rang for the clerk in the outer office.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOVERNMENT ENGINEER.

Nick Carter was a keen physiognomist. He no sooner saw the face of the young man who entered Chief Welden's office a little later, than he was sure of his lofty character and sterling integrity, as Welden already had asserted.

He was tall and erect, with the carriage of a soldier and set up like an athlete. His smoothly shaved face was of a classical cast, with clean-cut, regular features, fair complexion, and frank blue eyes, with a broad brow and wavy brown hair.

He then looked white and drawn, however, as men look who have aged years in as many days under some terrible experience. Mental distress of the most poignant kind was reflected in his face, and Nick rightly inferred, as Chief Welden also perceived, that the young man apprehended further direful disclosures and additional misery from this unexpected summons to the chief's office.

Welden hastened to reassure him, however, by saying, with sympathetic voice and a smile:

"Draw up a chair, Garland, and shake hands with this gentleman. We have brought him from New York to pull you out of this affair. I think he may succeed in doing so, for he rarely fails, if ever, in what he seriously undertakes. His own mother would not know him just now, however. Shake hands with Nick Carter."

Garland's face lighted as if a ray of sunshine had fallen on it. He clasped Nick's hand, felt its cordial and sympathetic pressure, and his voice choked despite himself.

"I'm awfully glad to know you, Mr. Carter, and ten thousand times more so in knowing that you are to look into this matter," he said feelingly; then, with a quick glance at the chief: "Why have I not been told of this, Chief Welden? You know what horrible anguish and anxiety I am undergoing."

"Very true, Garland," said Welden, smiling significantly. "But we did not know positively that Carter would be in a position to comply with the president's request. What good to have extended you false hopes? Sit down, now, and have a talk with Mr. Carter. He wants to ask you a few questions."

Garland hastened to comply, while Nick said, in a more businesslike fashion:

"Welden has told me all of the superficial circumstances, Mr. Garland, and I'll do what I can for you. Let's waste no time in getting right at the matter; for time is always valuable. Steady yourself and answer my questions as quickly and concisely as possible."

"I will do so, Mr. Carter," said Garland eagerly.

"To begin with, then, who else occupies your office in the war department? Are there any clerks, or others, in the employ of the government?"

"No, indeed," said Garland. "I have a private room and an outer office resembling these. I employ only a girl stenographer, who has a desk in the outer office."

"Does she know on what work you have been engaged?"

"No, sir. That is known only to Captain Backas and the heads of the department."

"All of whom are, of course, perfectly reliable," said Nick. "I now am aiming only to pick up a clew, Garland, to the identity of the person who could have had the information necessary to have framed up this job. Did your stenographer know you were going to Annapolis last Friday?"

"Yes, sir. I told her I was going the day before."

"Did you tell her for what?"

"No."

"Let's make a jump, then," said Nick. "Whom did you see in Annapolis, who might by any means have learned of your mission?"

"Only Captain Backas," said Garland emphatically. "I went directly to his office, where I remained until I left for my train to Washington."

"Who else was in the office during your conference with Captain Backas?"

"Nobody. We were alone."

"Did any one enter while you were talking with him?"

"No, sir. I am sure of that."

"And you are sure you placed the missing plans in the portfolio before leaving, and that it was not substituted for another before you left?"

"Yes, sir; absolutely sure."

"How did you go to the station?"

"In a taxicab."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good," said Nick. "Where did you ride in the train?"

"In the smoking car," said Garland. "I occupied a seat alone."

"Where was the portfolio?"

"I placed it between me and the wall of the car, next to the window, where my arm could rest on it during the ride. I was reading a book in the meantime."

"Could the portfolio have been removed by a person in the seat behind you without your knowing it?" Nick inquired.

"No, sir, absolutely," said Garland. "When I placed it there, Mr. Carter, I made sure there was no space between the end of the seat and the wall, through which the portfolio could slip. Naturally, sir, knowing the vast importance of its contents, I was exceedingly careful and constantly alert. It would have been utterly impossible for any person to have removed my portfolio and substituted another on the train."

"We will go a step farther, then," said Nick. "When you arrived in Washington and came from the Union Station, what did you do?"

"I hastened to find my friends who promised to meet me, Miss Barclay and Miss Warren," said Garland. "I found them nearly opposite the main exit. I got into the automobile with them and they——"

"One moment," Nick interposed. "Was it a limousine or an ordinary touring car?"

"A touring car."

"Top up?"

"No, sir."

"Who was in the car?"

"Only the two ladies and Hopkins, the chauffeur," said Garland. "To be more correct, however, Miss Barclay had alighted and was standing beside the car when I approached. She knew I would like to ride in the seat with Miss Warren, of whom I am especially fond, and she took the seat next to the chauffeur after our greeting."

"Just before you started for home, I infer?"

"Certainly."

"What were you carrying except the portfolio?"

"Only the book I had been reading."

"What did you do with them after entering the touring car?"

"I placed them beside me on the seat," said Garland.

Then, with a quick frown, he impulsively added:

"See here, Mr. Carter, don't suppose for a moment that either of my companions at that time know anything about this matter. They are incapable of such treachery as that. Put it out of your head, sir, if you have any such suspicion. I know positively that Verona Warren and Miss Barclay are above——"

"Pardon me," Nick interrupted a bit dryly. "What you know about them, Mr. Garland, is not material. I am not seeking to cast suspicion upon any one, least of all, your two lady friends. I want only to trace your movements as precisely as possible from the moment you left Annapolis. Pray don't infer that I have formed any definite suspicion."

A tinge of color came to Garland's pale face.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Carter," he said quickly. "I meant no offense. Nor do I question your motives. None could realize more keenly how much depends upon what you can do for me. Please continue your questions. I will answer them to the best of my ability."

"Very good," Nick replied. "As a matter of fact, then, you have not the slightest idea when, where, or by whom one portfolio was substituted for the other?"

"No, Mr. Carter, not the slightest," Garland quickly answered. "I am absolutely in the dark. I nearly fainted when I opened the portfolio and discovered my loss."

"Were you then alone in your apartments?"

"I was."

"What is the Grayling?" Nick inquired. "A hotel?"

"No. It is a private boarding house in Vermont Avenue, not far from the Thomas Circle."

"It's a first-class house, Carter," put in Chief Welden.

"I have no family," Garland added. "I'm quite alone in the world and likely to remain so—unless Verona Warren accepts me for her husband. It was my intention to lock the portfolio in a safe which I have in my room. I frequently have taken plans home for night study, Mr. Carter, so I thought nothing of doing so on this occasion. It was too late to put them in the vault in the department building."

"How soon after entering your room did you open the portfolio?" Nick asked.

"Immediately," said Garland. "I had in my overcoat pocket a memorandum relating to the plans, and I was about to put it in the portfolio before removing my coat."

"The substitution could not possibly have been made, then, after you entered your room?" Nick questioned.

"No, sir. There was no other person in the room."

"How long have you had the portfolio, Mr. Garland?"

"About a month. I bought it expressly to carry the plans in when I had occasion to take them from my office."

"Where did you buy it?"

"In Raymond's leather store in Pennsylvania Avenue."

"Were you alone at that time?"

"I was."

"Did you see others like it in the store?"

"Yes. There were several of the same kind."

"Now, Mr. Garland, about the plans," said Nick. "Are they so marked that the thief, or thieves, can definitely determine what they are and to precisely what part of the government work they relate?"

"No, not immediately," said Garland. "They are marked in cipher. It would take an expert, even, some little time to thoroughly understand them and to what they refer. In that, Mr. Carter, lies our only hope. If the plans could be recovered before the rascals learn just what they are——"

"They know what they are, Garland, or they would not

have framed up so crafty a job to get them," Nick interrupted. "We may be able, nevertheless, to recover them before they can be deciphered and definitely understood. In that, as you have said, lies our only hope. I will lose no time in getting in my work."

"What are your plans, Nick?" Chief Welden inquired. "If I can aid you in any way——"

"I will let you know, Welden, in that case," Nick interposed, rising to go. "I have no plans at present, nor do I know just how I shall proceed. I must consider the circumstances thoroughly. I will note your home address, Mr. Garland, in case I want to reach you out of business hours. That is all I require of you at present."

CHAPTER III.

A CURIOUS CLEW.

It was nearly four o'clock when Nick Carter left the Treasury Building, and he at once turned his steps toward the hotel to which he had directed the two men who had emerged with him from the Union Station.

They were, as no doubt was inferred, his two most efficient assistants, Chick Carter and Patsy Garvan, both in disguise, and four o'clock found them seated in the suite assigned them, to which their trunks and other luggage already had been brought.

Both then had removed their disguise and were reading the local newspapers, when Nick knocked on the door and was admitted by Patsy.

"Well, chief, what's up?" Patsy eagerly inquired, after closing the door.

Nick removed his outside garments and sat down.

"We have a hard nut to crack," he replied. "The case is a serious one, very serious."

"What's the nature of it?" Chick questioned. "I have been vainly searching the newspapers."

"The case has not reached the newspapers. The facts have been suppressed. They are known by only a few except the persons involved."

Nick then proceeded to tell them of what the case consisted, covering in detail all that he had learned from Chief Welden and Harold Garland.

"By Jove, it does look like a hard nut to crack," Chick agreed, after listening attentively. "It will make a mighty bad mess for the government unless those plans can be quickly recovered. Have you any definite suspicions?"

"Not exactly," Nick replied. "There is one point on which we first must decide."

"Just when and where the dummy portfolio was substituted for the other," said Chick.

"Precisely."

"How can we arrive at that?"

"By a process of elimination," said Nick. "It's not reasonable to suppose, in view of Garland's positive assertions, that Captain Backas is guilty of treachery and treason."

"Surely not," Chick coincided. "Furthermore, he would not have taken the risk that Garland would discover the crime even before leaving, or arriving at the Annapolis station. In that case he would, of course, have instantly attributed the crime to Backas."

"Very true," Nick nodded. "That alone is enough to confirm Garland's statements. He undoubtedly had the plans, then, when he started for the station. He rode alone in a taxicab. We can safely assume, then, that he still had his own portfolio when he boarded the train."

"It strikes me, chief, that there is the most likely place for the trick to have been turned," said Patsy.

"I don't agree with you."

"Why not?"

"Because of the publicity on a train," said Nick. "It would have been exceedingly difficult to steal the portfolio and substitute another without being seen by other passengers. If caught in the act, moreover, escape from a fast-moving train is almost impossible. Crooks shrink from taking such chances. They would have been much more likely to select a safer place for the job."

"That seems reasonable, chief, after all," nodded Patsy.

"It convinced me that Garland is right, which eliminates that part of his journey," Nick continued. "I think he had his own portfolio up to the time he entered the touring car with the two young ladies."

"But would either of them serve him such a trick?" Chick questioned doubtfully.

"Garland don't think so," Nick replied, smiling. "He was very quick to resent a mere suggestion to that effect. He admits having placed the portfolio on the seat, nevertheless, and it may have been then, or during the ride to his apartments, that the substitution was accomplished."

"By one of the women?"

"Presumably. The chauffeur could not have done it without being detected."

"But consider their character," said Chick. "One is the daughter of Senator Barclay. The other——"

"I prefer to consider the circumstances, Chick," Nick interrupted. "They are much more to the point just now. I will consider the women after having seen them."

"You say Miss Barclay sat in the front seat?"

"Yes, with the chauffeur," replied Nick. "She would have had less opportunity than the other. Her name is Verona Warren, but I did not inquire further concerning her. If Garland were to feel that I really suspect her, he might inadvertently betray the fact to her, even though cautioned against it, which would serve to put her on her guard."

"Surely."

"We will look up both of them a little later and see what we can learn about them," Nick added. "It was early evening, mind you, and such a trick could be much more easily turned in the dark than in daylight. That is another reason for my thinking that then is when it was done."

"You are right, too, I reckon," Chick allowed. "It seems almost incredible, nevertheless."

Nick did not reply to the last. He arose and went to the bathroom to remove his disguise and make a change of clothing.

Chick lit a cigar and fell to pondering upon the case, the extraordinary gravity of which gave it special interest. Patsy Garvan took a chair near one of the windows and resumed his perusal of a newspaper. He had been reading only a few minutes, when, looking up, he said abruptly:

"Gee! here's a curious case, Chick."

"Case of what?" Chick tersely questioned. "Not a case of beer, I hope."

"No, nothing like that," grinned Patsy. "A case of assault. Listen. I will read it to you."

He reverted to the newspaper again and read aloud the following article:

"'MYSTERY UNSOLVED.

"'The motive for the brutal assault suffered by Captain Casper Dillon last Friday evening is still an unsolved mystery. The circumstances, as stated by him and in part corroborated by a witness of the assault, afford no explanation of the outrage, which is said to have been entirely unprovoked.

"'The one man who was run down and arrested by the witness mentioned, moreover, still forcibly denies that he was one of the assailants, and asserts that he was only trying to protect Captain Dillon, and ran away only in pursuit of the two ruffians who had assaulted him, and who succeeded in making their escape.

"'Captain Dillon was returning to his lodgings at the time and had nearly arrived at his door. The street then appeared to be deserted. When passing the entrance to a narrow court, however, in which his assailants evidently had been lying in wait for him, Captain Dillon was set upon from behind and struck senseless with a bludgeon of some kind. The assault was so quickly committed that he had hardly a glimpse at his assailants, insufficient to identify them, or positively determine their number.

"'Paul Makepeace, a lawyer living in the same street, turned a corner just in time to see the three men running away and the insensible form of Captain Dillon lying on the sidewalk. Makepeace at once gave chase, overtaking one of the fleeing men in Indiana Avenue, where he was given in charge of a policeman.

"'The arrested man is Thomas Carney, and he is well known to the local police. He has twice been convicted of petty larceny, and is said to be of a depraved and desperate character.

"'Carney insists, nevertheless, that he was walking some thirty yards behind Captain Dillon, when two men sprang out of the court and felled the captain to the ground. Carney protests that he does not know either of the two ruffians, in pursuit of whom he claims to have started, and who appeared to have no other designs upon their unsuspecting victim.

"'This is confirmed in a measure by the fact that Captain Dillon was not robbed of anything, though he had considerable money and jewelry on his person. The thugs, on the other hand, may have feared to complete their work.

"'In the gutter near which Captain Dillon fell was found a false beard and mustache, evidently a disguise worn by one of the thugs, and which presumably was torn off and lost in the brief combat.

"'Captain Dillon states that he is completely in the dark as to the motive for the assault, as well as the identity of his assailants. He appeared in the municipal court when Carney was arraigned on Saturday morning. He was unable to refute the prisoner's statements, however, and Carney has been held pending further investigations. The case bids fair to remain, nevertheless, an unsolved mystery.'"

Patsy lowered the newspaper while he read the last line of the article, gazing over it at Chick who said indifferently:

"I see nothing very mysterious in that. The thugs had a grudge against Dillon for some reason, and they got back at him by knocking him on the head."

"They did that all right, at least," Patsy said dryly.

"It reads like a lot of smoke from a very small fire," Chick added. "There is nothing to it, in my opinion, if the whole truth were told. The reporter who wrote it up must have been working on space, or——"

"One moment," Nick interrupted, returning to the room while only partly dressed. "I don't quite agree with you, Chick. Read the story again, Patsy. I heard only parts of it while dressing."

Patsy hastened to comply, reading the article from beginning to end.

Nick stood listening while knotting his necktie. His strong, clean-cut face became more grave. His eyes took on a more intent expression.

"There may be more fire, Chick, than is supposed," said he, taking the newspaper from Patsy and glancing himself at the article. "I think there really is, in fact."

"Why so?" questioned Chick, a bit surprised. "For what reason?"

"Several," said Nick. "One because I have met Captain Casper Dillon and happen to know something about him. He is not the type of man I fancy."

"What about him, Nick?"

"He is not in active service, from which he retired several years ago because of a slow illness, from which his physician said he could not recover. He came out of it all right, nevertheless, and he since has occasionally been given minor foreign missions for the government, as he spends about half of his time abroad. He became quite conspicuous in the diplomatic broil we had with the Russian government three years ago, certain features of which I was called upon to investigate, resulting in an amicable adjustment of the whole business."

"I remember," Chick nodded.

"It was then that I met Captain Dillon," Nick added. "I suspected him of having been a bit off color in that affair, but I could not find sufficient evidence to warrant making charges against him. I venture to say, nevertheless, though probably no one would believe me, that he has been the indirect cause of more international correspondence by the state department than any other man in Washington. I confidently advised the secretary of state at that time to look out for him."

"A soldier of fortune, eh?" Chick remarked.

"I don't know about that," said Nick. "I do believe, however, that Captain Casper Dillon would not hesitate to increase his fortune by any crafty or even treasonable means that could be safely employed. That's what I think of Captain Dillon."

"He may have incurred the enmity, then, of the ruffians who assaulted him," said Chick. "Why do you attach special significance to the incident? I see nothing extraordinary in it."

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER'S DEDUCTIONS.

Nick Carter glanced again at the newspaper story. No man could have read more keenly between the lines. No logician could have deduced more significant points from its apparently trustworthy statements.

"You may not see anything in it, Chick, but I do," he replied, after a moment. "Some one, either Dillon or Carney, though very probably both of them, has been lying. These statements won't stand washing."

"That's the stuff, chief," said Patsy. "Put them through the wringer and squeeze out the dyestuff. What do you make of it?"

"Here is one point," Nick replied. "Carney claims to have been walking only a short distance behind Dillon when the assault was committed. It's a hundred to one in that case that the thugs would have seen him, or heard him. They were exercising caution and must have been on the lookout to avoid arrest, as well as to attack Dillon at a time and place precluding interference. They surely would have seen or heard Carney, therefore, if he was only thirty yards behind Dillon, and they would have known that he most likely would rush to his assistance."

"Sure thing, chief," declared Patsy. "There's no getting around it."

"Naturally, then, they would have postponed the assault, if revenge was their only incentive. That would have kept until another day."

"That's right, too chief."

"It's long odds, then, that Carney is lying," Nick continued. "In view of his running away, moreover, instead of waiting to see how badly Dillon was hurt, as most men would have done under such circumstances as Carney describes, he very probably was hiding with the thugs and was in league with them. That's more in line with his character, as here stated."

"There is something in that, Nick, after all," Chick said, more seriously. "I begin to think you are right."

"Assuming that I am, Carney evidently has determined not to betray his confederates," Nick went on. "He sees a loophole for escape in this story he has told, and he is going to stick to it. He knows the lawyer who pursued him cannot disprove it, having seen only the three men running away after the assault."

"That appears to be obvious, Nick, at least."

"But Carney may have still another motive," Nick added. "He is known to be a thief. The assault may have been made with intent to rob. In spite of Dillon's assertion to the contrary, moreover, the thugs may have robbed him of something."

"But he would know it in that case, Nick," said Chick. "What possible object could Dillon have in concealing the fact?"

Nick smiled a bit oddly.

"Suppose he was robbed of something which he does not dare admit having had on his person?" he said inquiringly.

"Gee whiz!" cried Patsy quickly. "You are thinking of the portfolio, chief."

"That calls the turn, Patsy," Nick replied. "Let's see what further warrants that idea. It is a significant fact that this assault was committed last Friday evening, that on which Garland was robbed of his portfolio."

"That's right, too, by gracious!" said Patsy, with increasing enthusiasm. "Gee! I'll bet we have struck the trail."

"But how could the portfolio have come into Dillon's hand?" Chick demanded skeptically.

"As well ask, Chick, how could it have been disposed of in the touring car, if that is where the theft was committed, as appears most probable," Nick replied. "We know that Verona Warren occupied the seat with Garland, on which he had placed his portfolio. She is the one person who, in spite of Garland's relations with her and evident faith in her, chiefly warrants suspicion. I got at that readily enough through the elimination process."

"That is true, Nick, I'll admit."

"Let's look a little deeper, then," Nick continued. "We know nothing definite about Verona Warren, and there may be something under the surface. She may not be all that is supposed, judging from her relations with Garland and with Senator Barclay's daughter, who should be above suspicion, of course, and naturally not distrustful of her intimate friend, this Warren girl."

"I get you," Chick nodded.

"It would have been possible, no doubt, for Verona Warren to have had the dummy portfolio concealed under her cloak, or some outside garment, when she went with Miss Barclay to the railway station," Nick went on. "It would have been much more difficult, as well as risky, however, if she succeeded in substituting the dummy and getting the other, for her to have retained both portfolios in the car. They are about fourteen inches square and an inch thick."

"I admit that, Nick, also."

"Naturally, then, she would have got rid of the one she had stolen. That could have been done, perhaps, by stealthily handing it to some one who passed near the touring car before it started, unobserved, in the stir and confusion outside of the station. Or it might have been done by dropping it from the moving car at some point agreed upon, where a confederate was to be waiting to pick it up."

"You certainly are figuring out a very clever job, all right," remarked Chick, laughing.

"Gee whiz! it listens good to me," said Patsy, with an expressive shake of his head. "I'll bet money to marbles that it hits somewhere near the truth."

"Let's see what more we find in support of it," continued Nick, glancing again at the newspaper. "A disguise said to have been worn by one of the thugs was found near Dillon's body after the assault."

"What do you deduce from that?"

"Why was it torn from the face of the thug?" Nick questioned argumentatively. "How could that have occurred? There surely was no great struggle, if Dillon was struck down so quickly that he could not identify, nor even determine the number of his assailants. There was no reasonable occasion for one of the thugs to have lost his disguise, nor to have left it there, even if it was torn from his face. He could easily have picked it up before he fled."

"Sure thing, chief," Patsy again agreed. "I see what you are coming to, all right."

"We can come to only one conclusion, Patsy."

"That Dillon himself was the man who wore the disguise?"

"Exactly," said Nick. "It is easy to see how it may have been torn from his face, or displaced when he fell to the sidewalk. That further appears in that it was found near his body."

"But why was Dillon in disguise?" Chick persistently questioned.

"If he was the man who was to relieve Verona Warren of the stolen portfolio, he very likely would have been in disguise," Nick pointedly answered.

"By Jove, there's some truth in that!" Chick quickly allowed. "If you have sized him up correctly, he might,

indeed, be a traitor to his country and in league with others to steal these government plans."

"That's the very point, Chick. He may be in league with the foreign spies mentioned by Chief Welden and suspected to have come here with that very object in view."

"But who were his assailants? How could they have known he had the plans?"

"They may have seen him with the portfolio," suggested Patsy.

"But how could they have known what it contained?"

"Gee, that's so. They might have known, Chick, all the same."

"Furthermore," Chick added, "Makepeace, the lawyer who pursued them, ought to have seen them get away with the portfolio, if that was really the case."

"Not necessarily," Nick objected. "They were well away before Makepeace saw them and started after them. He probably saw only the backs and rapidly moving legs of the two who escaped. He might not have been able to see in the darkness of the evening what either of them was carrying."

"By Jove, this makes a curious case of it," said Chick. "If you are right, then, the plans have been stolen from the original thieves, Verona Warren and Captain Dillon, and now are in the hands of other crooks."

"That would be about the size of it if, as you say, I am right," Nick replied. "But that word 'if' is just as big as it ever was, or ever will be. I may be all wrong. There may be no connection whatever between the assault upon Captain Dillon and the theft of the governmental plans. The circumstances seem to warrant my theory, however, and it's up to us to find out whether it is correct."

"Gee! I should say so!" cried Patsy. "It looks to me like the real thing."

"It would prove of vast advantage to us, of course, if the plans are in the hands of ruffians who cannot readily understand them, or appreciate their vast importance," Nick added. "It might enable us to recover them before they can be traced and secured again by the original thieves, who are undoubtedly able to turn them to the worst possible use."

"We may be too late."

"You mean?"

"They may already have begun negotiations to recover them, and possibly have succeeded," said Chick.

Nick gazed thoughtfully at the floor for a moment.

"I don't think so," he then said decidedly. "That is to say, Chick, I don't think they have succeeded. The thugs who have the plans, and who evidently were out to get them at some little risk, must have some idea of their character and value."

"That's true, of course."

"Naturally, then, while they might enter into negotiations, perhaps, they would not be likely to let go of the plans until they have craftily learned from whom they can get the biggest price for them. In other words, they would hold off to find the highest bidder."

"That seems reasonable, too, assuming them to be the type of thugs this newspaper article indicates."

"How would it do, chief, to try to open negotiations with them through the press, pretending to be persons interested in getting the plans?" asked Patsy, eager to be at work on the case.

"That already may have been done, or Carney may have been approached during his imprisonment, with a view to getting in touch with his confederates," Nick replied. "I must find out about that."

"At once?"

"I have time for a call at the city prison before dinner," Nick nodded. "In the meantime, have a look through the newspapers for any personal, or other advertisement that might possibly refer to this matter. I will return before six o'clock."

CHAPTER V.

PAVING THE WAY.

It was only five o'clock when Nick left the hotel, no longer in disguise, and he hastened through E Street to his destination. He found a police sergeant in the outer office, a stranger to him, as was he to the sergeant, but who politely informed him that Captain Hardy, with whom the detective was well acquainted, was in his private office.

Nick walked in without the ceremony of knocking.

A portly, full-featured man with close-cut gray hair turned from his desk to see who had entered.

"Hello, Hardy," said Nick, approaching him. "I cannot see that you have lost an ounce since we last met."

"Well, by thunder!" Captain Hardy sprang up and extended his hand.

"Buy herrings, Hardy, instead," laughed Nick, while they shook hands. "You'll get more for your money."

"Well, well, I'm delighted to see you," replied Hardy, placing a chair near his own. "You look like a four-time winner, Nick. Sit down. What brought you to Washington?"

"The morning limited," smiled Nick. "I have been here only a few hours."

"I am pleased with so early a call," said Hardy, producing a box of cigars from his desk drawer. "But I know you too well, Carter, to flatter myself that it's a purely social one. What can I do for you?"

"You become keen with age, Hardy, like a good blade," said Nick, more seriously. "This is between us, mind you."

"That goes without saying."

"There was an assault committed here last Friday evening on Captain Casper Dillon, a retired army officer. What do you know about it?"

"Have you seen to-day's papers?"

"That is where I got my information. I wish to know what you can add to it."

"Nothing," said Captain Hardy. "They tell the whole story, so far as I know, or any one else appears to know."

"The man arrested, Tom Carney, is still in custody?"

"Yes. His case was continued until to-morrow. It will probably come up in the afternoon session."

"Has he received any mail?"

"No, not a piece."

"Any visitor?"

"Only his lawyer."

"I infer from the newspaper story that Carney is a bad egg," said Nick. "Am I right?"

"He's a bad egg in a small way," Hardy nodded. "He is somewhat of a ruffian and has twice been convicted of

stealing. But he is not what I consider a dangerous crook. He has no great ability."

"He may have been associated with some one who has," said Nick suggestively.

"I cannot say about that," was the reply. "I lately have heard very little about Carney until this affair came off."

"Have you the disguise found on the scene of the assault?"

"Yes."

"May I see it?"

"Certainly."

Captain Hardy arose to bring it from the outer office.

Nick also arose and accompanied him as far as the door. When it swung open and Hardy went out, a man was passing through the outside office on his way to the street.

He was well built, well dressed, a man apparently about forty years of age. He was smooth shaved, with strong features, evincing mental power, nerve force and bulldog tenacity. He was a man at whom one would turn for a second glance, as if impelled by some subtle magnetic emanation from the other.

Nick Carter saw him, and he saw Nick.

Their gaze met suddenly and lingered for a moment, but the face of neither changed by so much as a shadow. Nick knew this man, but he instantly suppressed any sign of recognition.

If the other knew Nick, or apprehended recognition, he had equal command of his feelings. Even the light in his keen, cold eyes underwent no change. His firm stride did not falter for an instant. He walked out to the street, stepped into an automobile, and, without a backward glance, he was rapidly driven away.

Nick resumed his seat and examined the disguise presently brought in by Captain Hardy. It was a combination beard and mustache of dark color. The lining was considerably soiled, so that a trade-mark on it was hardly discernible.

"I cannot make it out," Hardy remarked, when Nick took a convex lens from his pocket through which to examine it. "It looks like a foreign word."

"It is a foreign word," said Nick. "This disguise was made in Vienna."

"What does that signify? Anything of importance?"

"I know of nothing," said Nick evasively, placing the disguise on the desk. "I merely wanted to see it. By the way, Hardy, did you see the man who just went through the outer office?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Who is he?"

"Some one the sergeant admitted. He has charge out there. The man was a stranger to me."

"But not to me," said Nick significantly.

"What do you mean? Who is he?"

"Did you ever hear of Andrew Margate, better known across the water as Andy Margate?"

"I don't think so, Nick," said Hardy. "What about him?"

"He is as keen, clever, and dangerous a crook as could be found on two continents," Nick said impressively.

"The devil you say!"

"Devil is right!" Nick replied dryly. "Margate is a veritable genius for crime. He is a marvel of versatility and perverted ability. He is the one crook most feared in Europe to-day, where I supposed he was, instead of in this country. He seldom ventures over here."

"You appear to know him very well, nevertheless," smiled Captain Hardy.

"I have his photograph, several of them, and his criminal record," Nick replied. "I knew him instantly, Hardy, though we never had met before. I hardly think he knew me, though I am not sure of it, for he is a type of man who would not betray it. He is said to have nerves of steel and the courage of a tiger. Have you seen him here before?"

"No, never," said Hardy. "Is he wanted by the European police?"

"Quite likely, I think, but I have received no notice to that effect."

"Why didn't you arrest him on suspicion?"

"I have nothing on him, Hardy, nor any wish to get myself in wrong," Nick evasively replied, not inclined to state his true reason for not having interfered with Margate. "Ask your sergeant what he wanted. One moment. Make no explanations. This must go no farther."

"I understand, Nick," nodded Captain Hardy. "Trust me to be dumb. I'll call Foley in here."

He turned to his desk and touched an electric bell. The summons was answered almost immediately, and the sergeant seen by Nick in the outer office entered the room.

"You rang, chief?" said he respectfully.

"Yes, sergeant," Captain Hardy replied, turning toward him. "Who is the man who left here a few minutes ago?"

"Well, I don't know his name, chief," said Foley. "He brought a note from Mr. Brigham, the lawyer who is looking after Carney's case."

"What did the man want?"

"He only wanted to deliver a message to the prisoner from the lawyer," Foley explained. "The lawyer could not come himself, so he sent the man with a note."

"You allowed him to see Carney?"

"I did, sir."

"Did you think you were taking no chances, Foley, in doing so?" Captain Hardy inquired.

"Well, sir, I thought I made sure it was all right," said Foley, coloring.

"How so?"

"I telephoned to Brigham's office, sir, and asked him whether he had sent the man."

"What did Brigham say?"

"He said that he had, sir, and that it was all right," said Foley. "So I let him go in and take the message. I would have admitted the lawyer, sir, so I supposed it was all right to admit the man he had sent."

"Very good," nodded Captain Hardy. "That's all, Foley."

The sergeant touched his cap and withdrew.

"Well, Nick, what do you say to it?"

"Who is Lawyer Brigham?" Nick inquired. "What standing has he as a lawyer?"

"Well, not the best," smiled Hardy. "He is somewhat of a shyster, Nick, if the truth were told."

"It may be all right, then, or it may be all wrong," said Nick.

"What do you mean?"

"Andy Margate is, as I have said, a very keen and crafty fellow," Nick explained. "It is probable that he

is a friend of Carney and that he engaged the lawyer in his behalf. He may have paid Brigham for the letter to insure him a brief interview with Carney, or he may have fooled him into giving it with no felonious intent. It really is not material. One fact is obvious, however."

"Namely?"

"That Margate had some communication of his own for Carney."

"What do you advise doing, in that case?"

"Nothing, Hardy, on your part," said Nick. "I think I see my way clear to doing all that should be done, in so far as this incident is concerned. Who is the judge before whom Carney will appear to-morrow?"

"Judge Greeley."

"Where does he reside?"

"I will find you his address," said Captain Hardy. "I haven't got it in my head."

Nick accompanied him to the outer office, where they consulted a city directory.

Twenty minutes later Nick alighted from a taxicab in front of the jurist's residence. He found Judge Greeley at home, to whom he introduced himself, confiding the occasion for his visit and his reasons for the request he was about to make in regard to the case of Carney.

It seems needless to say that the request was readily granted, the nature of which will presently appear.

CHAPTER VI.

NICK SHOWS HIS HAND.

It was after eleven o'clock when Nick Carter, in immaculate evening dress, sauntered alone into the fashionable restaurant. He had found certain persons whom he had been seeking, more of them than he had been expecting to find. He had discovered them in a box at the opera, and had followed them in a taxicab after the curtain had fallen upon Leonora's tragic death.

The scene over which Nick cast a seemingly indifferent eye was a brilliant one. The glare of light, the throng of well-dressed men, of beautiful women in gorgeous attire and radiant with jewels, the clink of fragile glasses, the rippling laughter of pretty girls, the murmur of cultivated voices, all mingled with the fascinating strains of orchestral music—Nick Carter took it all in with a few swift glances while the head waiter approached to conduct him to a seat.

"There is a vacant table near that at which Senator Barclay and his friends are seated," Nick quietly remarked, deftly slipping a generous tip into the waiter's hand.

The crisp bank note was felt and properly appreciated.

"Certainly, sir. This way, sir."

"Forget that I suggested it," Nick added.

"My mind is a blank, sir."

"A waiter who knows his business," thought Nick.

He followed him to a small table near one of the lace-draped windows.

At a large one in an alcove scarce ten feet away seven persons were seated. They included Senator Barclay and his daughter Estella, a handsome brunette in the twenties, who with her father appeared to be entertaining the others.

A well-built, distinguished-looking man, attractive aside from a habitual sinister squint, was seated next to Miss Barclay. He was close upon fifty and his hair was streaked with gray. There was a bruise on his brow, partly hidden by a treatment of paint and powder. He was the victim of the recent assault by unknown thugs—Captain Casper Dillon.

Next to him sat a massive, powerful man, with a large head and a profuse growth of tawny hair and beard, giving him a leoine aspect. Obviously, he was a foreigner, as was a corpulent, showily dressed woman seated opposite.

Another was the government engineer, Garland, looking drawn and white, in spite of his efforts to appear congenial; while next to him was seated a slender, graceful woman of almost dazzling beauty and brilliancy, her sinuous figure ravishingly clad and her abundance of auburn hair fairly ablaze with costly gems.

"H'm, just so," thought Nick, furtively gazing. "Verona Warren, eh? Wonderful eyes, an irresistible smile, a mouth like a rosebud, and a matchless complexion—but not all her own. She is a skillful woman who, at thirty-five, can strip off enough years to appear like a débutante. Lost his head to Madame Irma Valaska, eh? I thought I might be right—and now I know it."

Ten minutes passed.

None of the group in the alcove had an eye for the solitary man seated near one of the windows, apparently absorbed in his wine and lunch. Only one among them would have recognized him. Not Garland, however, for Garland had seen him only in disguise that afternoon.

Nick could occasionally catch a few words uttered more vivaciously than others, but none were of special significance. He saw Stella Barclay frowning at times upon Garland, however, and finally heard her inquire:

"What on earth, Harry, has come over you? You're as dumb as an oyster, and dreadfully white."

"Pardon!" Garland exclaimed, brightening quickly. "I did not realize it, Miss Barclay."

"I have noticed it all of the evening. You are not ill, are you?"

"No, indeed."

"Miss Barclay is right," said Captain Dillon, with a squint from one to the other. "I have noticed it. One would think, Garland, that you have lost your best friend."

"My best friend is here," smiled Garland, glancing at the woman beside him. "I have not lost her, I hope."

She laid her hand on his and bent nearer to him.

The others laughed and Captain Dillon gazed, turning slightly from his companions, for the first time on the face of the detective. He started perceptibly and lost color for a moment.

Nick pretended to see him at the same moment. He bowed and smiled, touching his lips with one finger at the same time, and glancing significantly at the chair opposite his own.

Captain Dillon nodded slightly, and a few moments later he excused himself, remarking to his companions:

"There is an old friend of mine. I want just a word with him."

They glanced at Nick, but none knew him by sight, and the incident was entirely conventional.

Captain Dillon took the opposite chair and extended his hand, which Nick pressed cordially while remarking:

"I thought I remembered you, Captain Dillon, and I made haste to put you on your guard when I saw that

you recognized me. I am here incognito. I don't wish to be known. Pray don't expose me to your friends."

"Certainly not!" Dillon quietly exclaimed, squinting at Nick over the table. "I'm very glad you warned me, or I certainly would have done so."

"I foresaw it, captain," smiled Nick. "You have not changed much in the several years since we met. You hold your own like an old war horse. I am pleased to meet you again."

"That feeling is reciprocated, Mr. Carter, I assure you," Captain Dillon said quietly. "How long have you been in Washington?"

"Not long," said Nick. "I am here on important business. I cannot tell when I may leave. That depends."

"Upon the business mentioned, of course," said Dillon, with an expression between a smirk and a smile.

"Exactly," bowed the detective.

"Government business, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Secret business, or——"

"Well, in a way," said Nick, when the other paused with an inquiring squint. "It relates to the theft of some important documents."

"I see," Captain Dillon nodded, with steadfast scrutiny. "Diplomatic correspondence, perhaps, or——"

"No, not exactly," smiled Nick. "They are, in fact, of a very different character. I am not at liberty to inform you precisely, however, as you may infer."

"Yes, certainly," Dillon readily allowed. "But did you expect to find them here, or——"

"Well, no, not quite that," Nick again replied agreeably, as if oblivious to the other's insinuating manner. "That would be too much to have expected. I am inclined to distrust a certain person who now is at supper, here, however, and I'm keeping an eye on him."

"Ah, I see."

"But do not imagine, Captain Dillon, because I am seated so near your table, that he is in your party," Nick added, in jesting fashion.

Captain Dillon laughed softly and shrugged his shoulders.

"I should hope not," he replied, with a deprecatory gesture. "All of my party are above suspicion. You know Senator Barclay by sight, of course, and the dark-haired girl is his daughter. That tall, fine-looking chap is Captain Garland, a government engineer in the war department. I really must rejoin them now. Here is my card. If you remain long in town and find it convenient, call and see me. I would be delighted."

"I will try to do so," said Nick, a bit dryly. "I am at the Willard. Drop in and inquire for Mr. Arthur Greenleaf."

Captain Dillon laughed and promised to do so, then bowed and rejoined his friends.

"A rat, if there ever was one," thought Nick. "No need to tell him more definitely what business brought me here. He will infer that I suspect Garland of having stolen the plans, however, and that will throw him off his guard. He will feel dead sure, too, that I do not suspect him, or I would not have confided in him. No sane man could reason otherwise."

Nick left the restaurant before Senator Barclay and his party, but he did not go far. He waited outside in disguise, one easily and quickly adjusted, until the suspects emerged. He saw the hairy foreigner, in company with the corpulent woman and the said Verona Warren, part from the others and ride away in a limousine.

Senator Barclay and his daughter left in another, after shaking hands with Garland and Captain Dillon, who then hailed a taxicab and rode away together.

Nick had one waiting near by, to which he hastened and gave the driver his instructions.

"To the Grayling, Vermont Avenue. Drop me there as quickly as possible."

Ten minutes served to turn the trick.

Nick waited in the doorway of an opposite dwelling. His watch said one o'clock when Garland put in an appearance. He came on foot, walking slowly, staggering at times as if drunk. Nick had noticed, however, that the young man drank nothing in the restaurant. He crossed over and intercepted him at his door.

"You return late, Garland," said he. "I have been waiting for you."

Garland stared at him with feverish eyes, as white as a sheet, with that terrible expression of anguish and anxiety on his drawn features that Nick had noticed in the afternoon.

"Beg pardon!" he muttered, pulling himself together. "I don't think I know you."

"Yes, you do," said Nick. "We met this afternoon in Welden's office. I am Nick Carter."

"Oh, good heavens!" Garland seized the detective's arm. "Welden said I would not have known you. Tell me—do you bring me good news? You have been waiting for me. You must, then, have learned something."

"Invite me in," Nick replied. "There will be time enough for me to tell you."

"Pardon! Certainly," Garland said, fishing out his keys. "I'm so frightfully upset that I scarce know what I'm doing. I started for home in a taxi, but couldn't remain in it. I was so infernally nervous. I wanted to walk—walk—walk. I shall go stark mad, Carter, unless those plans are recovered. Come up to my room."

Nick followed him to a handsomely furnished double room on the second floor.

Garland switched on the lights, throwing off his hat and inverness, and then placing cigars and cigarettes on the table.

"Help yourself, Mr. Carter, but don't keep me in suspense," he pleaded. "What have you learned?"

Nick did not hurry. He settled back in an armchair, lighting a cigar, and inquired:

"Where have you been?"

"To the opera." Garland swung round from the roller shades he had lowered. "God above! isn't it ghastly! Think of it! To the opera—with a heart of lead and blood like ice in one's veins. But I had to go, have to keep up appearances, or the truth might leak out. On the dead, Carter, I think I am booked for the bug house. Do tell me what you have——"

"Patience," Nick interrupted. "Sit down and be calm. When I talk with a man I want him to have a level head on his shoulders. That's right; light a cigarette. It will steady you—temporarily. Where did you go after the opera?"

"To supper with a party of friends."

"Including whom?"

"Senator Barclay and his daughter, the Baron Esterveldt and his wife, with Miss Warren, whom I mentioned to you this afternoon. Captain Casper Dillon, an ex-army

officer, joined us in our box and accompanied us to supper. He is a friend of the Esterveldts."

"Captain Dillon," Nick observed, blowing a wreath of smoke toward the ceiling. "Ex-army officer, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Are you well acquainted with him?"

"Quite well. I meet him frequently at the home of the Esterveldts, when I go there to see Miss Warren. She is their niece, you know, and Captain Dillon is an intimate friend of the family."

"Miss Warren is their niece?"

"Yes."

"How did that happen? Hers is an English name."

"Her father was an English naval officer."

"Ah!"

"He married a sister of the Baron Esterveldt. Both have been dead for several years, and Verona since has lived with the Esterveldts."

"H'm, I see."

"They have an extensive estate in Bohemia and a residence in Berlin. They have been in Washington nearly a year, however, for Verona is very fond of America and of Miss Barclay. They met abroad more than a year ago and became very friendly. The Baron Esterveldt entertained the Barclays at that time, and Senator Barclay is now doing all in his power to return the compliment."

"Naturally," said Nick oddly.

"It was through him that I met Miss Warren and—well, I fell over head and ears in love with her." Garland enthused for a moment. "She's a wonderful girl, Carter, a marvel of beauty, wit, and brilliancy. You ought to meet her. To see her is to worship her. She's the most fascinating girl——"

"Where do the Esterveldts reside?" Nick interposed.

"They rent a fine place near the Dupont Circle, that of the late General Dexter."

Nick mentally noted the location, then said a bit bluntly, throwing his half-smoked cigar into a cuspidor:

"That, I infer, is all you know about these people?"

Garland stared at him.

"Know about them?" said he. "What more need one know? Why do you speak like that? Why have you delayed to question me about them? Tell me, Carter, I implore you, what have you learned about——"

Nick checked him with a gesture.

"I have learned enough, Garland, to convince me that I am justified in what I am about to say," he replied impressively. "It is going to hurt you. It is going to stab you in a tender spot, but it will be for your own good, and I have no alternative but to say it. Your honor is at stake, Garland, and the integrity of a United States senator is in jeopardy."

Garland lurched forward in his chair.

"Good God!" he gasped hoarsely. "What do you mean, Carter? What do you mean?"

"Did you see Captain Dillon talk with a man at another table this evening?"

"Yes, of course."

"Did you see the man?"

"Certainly."

"Could you identify him if you were to see him again?"

"Yes, yes, surely! But why——"

"Have a look."

Nick removed his disguise and thrust it into his pocket.

Garland swayed unsteadily, staring with wide, dilated eyes and twitching lips. He did not speak for a moment. He seemed to be trying to grasp the situation, to take in the full significance of what Nick had said, and evidently had done. He made a desperate effort to steady himself, clenching his hands till the nails ate into the palms.

Then, suddenly, he hurled his cigarette into the fireplace and spoke with a sort of fierce composure, as a man might who had clutched his heart with his hand and held it with an iron grip.

"I have heard that you are a man of many faces," said he. "I now can believe it. I know, too, that you are one man in a million, that you are above dramatic claptraps and needless subterfuge. I'm nerved for whatever you may say to me. Come across with it."

"Good for you," said Nick approvingly. "You're a big man, Garland, big in more ways than one, and a splendid future awaits you. You are so big, in fact, like other men I have known, that you are blind to the servile treachery and dirty trickery of which some are capable, both being so foreign to you. That is one reason why big men are sometimes easily made the dupes of the others."

"Dupes?"

"I heard you say to-night, Garland, that you hoped you had not lost your best friend."

"Best—best friend! You don't mean—you don't mean ——"

Garland choked and loosened the collar on his throbbing neck.

"I mean the woman you know as Verona Warren," said Nick. "I am going to take her away from you—for your own good."

"You mean——"

"I mean that her name is not Verona Warren," Nick went on impressively. "I saw her in St. Petersburg three years ago, while engaged on a case for this government. She did not see me, or know of my presence there, but I learned all about her. She then was a spy in the Russian secret service, one of their cleverest, bar none. Her name is Irma Valaska. She is the widow of a Russian soldier who was killed in Korea. Two years ago she failed in a mission intrusted to her, and she fled from Russia. She then entered the secret service of one of the Balkan states. I don't know just what European power she now is serving, but I do know——"

Nick leaned forward and spoke with redoubled earnestness.

"I do know that she is here as a spy for some foreign power, or powers; that her secret mission is to get information concerning our coast-line fortifications and defense. I know that she, with them to whom she pretends to be related, this Baron Esterveldt and his wife, have made you and Senator Barclay their dupes, and that the theft of your portfolio and the government plans was the work of this woman, as base, treacherous, and ——"

"Stop! I cannot believe——"

"You stop!" Nick forcibly interrupted. "Do I need to say, Garland, that I would not tell you this if I were not absolutely sure of it? I am absolutely sure. Listen to me. I will tell you something more."

Garland obeyed and listened, not once interrupting. He looked like a man turned to stone.

Nick told him from beginning to end what he had learned since talking with Chief Welden, also much that he had done and suspected.

It brought home the truth to his hearer. It opened his eyes to the treachery of which he had been the victim. It turned to dead ashes the love that had made it possible. He covered his ghastly face with his hands, sobbing convulsively for several moments, and then he met the blow man fashion.

"My God, it is terrible, terrible!" he said hoarsely, gazing again at Nick. "You have forced me to believe, to realize, but—oh, this woman!"

"She has deceived abler men than you, Garland," said Nick kindly. "You must tear her out of your heart."

"Must—I have!" said Garland, with sudden vehemence. "There is no alternative."

"As a matter of fact, Garland, this conspiracy dates back more than a year," Nick said confidently. "It began with the Baron Esterveldt's hospitality to the Barclays when they were abroad. It was framed up at that time and the way paved for what since has occurred. Captain Dillon had a hand in it as long ago as that, for I since have learned that he then was in Europe."

"You must be right, Carter," Garland said, more calmly. "I now see it plainly. My honor is at stake, as you said, and the integrity of Senator Barclay. What's to be done?"

"You can do nothing," Nick replied. "The recovery of those plans before any advantage can be derived from them is my work."

"But is it possible?"

"I must make it possible. You, Garland, must do what I direct."

"I will. But what?"

"I want you where I can reach you quickly, if necessary," said Nick. "I also think it wise for you to disappear temporarily. I may be able to turn that to some advantage. I am stopping at the Willard. Leave here to-morrow morning and register there in this disguise under the name of John Black. Get a room on the third floor, if possible, on which I am located."

"I will do so," said Garland, taking the disguise.

"I am registered as Arthur Greenleaf," Nick added. "Two of my assistants are in same suite. Don't seek me, however, nor make any inquiries. Merely lie low and wait till I come to you. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," said Garland. "I will follow your instructions to the letter."

"Very good," Nick replied. "Where is the dummy portfolio and the papers it contained?"

"Here, in my safe."

"Just as you found it when you arrived home last Friday evening?"

"Yes."

"Let me have it," said Nick. "I think I can make use of it."

Garland hastened to get it.

Nick examined it for a moment, then arose and extended his hand.

"That's all for to-night, Garland," said he. "Keep a stiff upper lip. There will be something doing to-morrow."

CHAPTER VII.

INTO A TRAP.

"Andy Margate is the man we must get. He is the rascal who now has the government plans. Andy Margate is the man we must get—and lose no time in getting him."

These forcible declarations came from Nick Carter soon after eight o'clock on the morning following his impressive interview with Harold Garland. They were addressed to Chick and Patsy, then in their suite in the Willard immediately after breakfast.

"But how to get him is the question," Chick replied. "Patsy and I have searched every inch of advertising space in every newspaper, but we could find absolutely nothing that seems to relate to the stolen plans."

"Which denotes very plainly to me, Chick, that Margate has not yet begun negotiations to dispose of them, neither with the original thieves, nor with any government official," said Nick.

"That's reasonable, of course."

"Naturally, too, Garland is the man with whom he would most likely have communicated," Nick added. "He has not done so, which further convinces me that I am right. Margate and his confederates are waiting for some move or publication by the government, and to see where they can get in their work to the best advantage."

"It does look so, Nick, I'll admit," Chick allowed.

"We must get them, therefore, before they can accomplish anything more serious."

"But how?"

"I have opened the way," said Nick. "Carney will be liberated this morning. If my theory is correct, he will hasten to rejoin Margate and the other scamp who assaulted Dillon."

"Gee! that looks like a copper-riveted cinch," said Patsy. "Carney can be shadowed and the others located."

"That is precisely what I want you to do, Patsy," Nick replied. "Go to the courthouse in disguise and pick him up when he leaves. Keep an eye on him till you have found the others, and then report to me as quickly as possible."

"Trust me for that, chief," said Patsy, hastening to make ready.

"In the meantime, Chick, you begin an espionage on the Esterveldt place," Nick directed. "I suspect that Margate knows of Dillon's intimacy with them, and if he knows the occasion of it, he may attempt to covertly communicate with them. The Baron Esterveldt undoubtedly is the big finger in the service of the foreign power guilty of this conspiracy. He is the one who is providing the money, a fact that Margate may have discovered."

"I agree with you," said Chick. "That would be the natural quarter for the rascal to turn. I'll have an eye on the place within half an hour."

"Very good."

"What are your own plans?"

"I'm going after Captain Casper Dillon," said Nick, with ominous intonation. "I have opened the way to that, also. I propose to clinch my suspicions without further delay. I want that miscreant traitor at the outset, and I'm going to get him."

"That's the stuff, chief," cried Patsy. "He ought to be nailed right off the reel."

"He'll be nailed, Patsy, all right," Nick grimly answered.

There was the usual gathering of spectators in the municipal court that morning. Some persons have a morbid interest in watching the wheels of justice revolve, in viewing culprits vainly squirming to slip through the meshes of the legal net, and to witness their condemnation to righteous punishment.

Among them that morning was a sinister-looking fellow in a baggy brown suit and woolen shirt, who would really have looked more in place in the prisoner's dock than in one of the chairs allotted to spectators.

He had no interest in the proceedings, nevertheless, until the case of Thomas Carney was called and that worthy put in an appearance—a stocky, dark man of thirty, wearing a scowl evincing his resentment of his long detention in custody.

Much to his surprise, no doubt, as well as that of his lawyer, the court was favorably impressed with the argument of his attorney, and decided there were no grounds for longer holding the prisoner, and Mr. Thomas Carney was forthwith discharged.

Patsy Garvan, the spectator in baggy brown, then had disappeared from the courtroom. He was watching from across the street the door from which Carney would emerge, and he had not long to wait.

Carney came out with his lawyer, with whom he shook hands before they parted. He then hurried through Sixth Street, bringing up in a few minutes near Center Market, where he was met by a seedy fellow who emerged from the market, and who evidently said a few words to him while passing.

Patsy was not near enough to hear him, however, though he detected the fact and came to a quick conclusion.

"That fellow was waiting for him and gave him instructions from some one," he said to himself. "It has started him in a new direction. It's money to marbles that he was directed where to meet Margate."

Patsy was right to that extent.

Carney appeared, however, to have no thought that he might be followed, which made it perfectly easy for Patsy to shadow him.

Pausing only once in a barroom, where he gulped a stiff drink of whisky, Carney shaped a course that took him into one of the lowest parts of the city, where he brought up at an inferior wooden house adjoining a narrow court making in next to the bare back wall of a brewery.

Sauntering by the court, into which Carney had quickly disappeared, Patsy saw that a diverging alley led to the back of the house, beyond which was a motley collection of old buildings, at none of the windows of which he could discover any person.

"I'll take a chance in the alley," he said to himself, noting that the narrow court was deserted. "The rascal evidently has entered the back door of the house. I must find out for what, or who's there, at least. It may be where the rascal lives."

Turning back, having come to that decision, Patsy stole into the court, crouching below the side windows of the house, the curtains of which were lowered. Then hugging the board fence of a small rear yard, he crept to the entrance of the alley, into which he cautiously peered.

Despite his caution, however, this move was a fatal one. His head no sooner protruded beyond the corner of the fence, than an uplifted bludgeon fell as quick as a flash, catching him squarely on the skull and sending him to the ground as if felled with an ax.

Three men, including Carney, quickly leaped upon him, one instantly winding a thick scarf around his head; and before Patsy had even begun to recover from the stunning blow, he was caught up bodily and carried through the back door of the house, which one of the ruffians hurriedly closed and locked.

A dash of cold water brought Patsy to himself, so completely to himself, in fact, that he realized what had occurred before he betrayed that he was reviving; and instantly resolved to hide that fact until he could learn, or stealthily draw his revolver and hold up his captors.

The last ambitious move was nipped in the bud by a sharp command from one of them—a wiry, muscular fellow in the twenties, whose right hand had struck Patsy to the ground.

"Cut out that water, Tom," he cried, addressing Carney, who had dashed the water upon Patsy after they had dropped him on the kitchen floor. "This isn't a bathhouse. Turn him over first and be sure we are right. See whether he carries a gun and bracelets. Those would clinch it."

"I know I'm right," said another, with a voice so cold and keen that it fairly cut into Patsy's ears. "You'll find both gun and bracelets. Put the irons on him, hands behind him, and make sure they are tightly locked. There will be time enough to revive him."

"That's no pipe dream, Andy," said the other, while he hastened to assist Carney.

They had turned Patsy face downward while speaking, both crouching over him, and he knew that any attempt to resist them would result only in additional rough usage and do no earthly good. The mention of Margate's name, however, had told him into whose hands he had fallen, and their remarks indicated plainly enough that he had walked into a trap.

"I thought you had killed him, Larry, mebbe," growled Carney. "I wanted to make sure you hadn't. I'm not running my neck into a rope."

"Rope be hanged!" snapped the other, subsequently learned to be one Laurence Trent, and by far the worst crook of the two. "Ah, I thought so. Here they are, Andy."

Patsy felt his two revolvers jerked from his pockets, and then the chill of the handcuffs around his wrists, locked with a pressure that nearly stopped the circulation. He still pretended to be unconscious, nevertheless, bent upon learning more and biding his time for a countermove.

"I knew you would find them," said Margate. "I've known from the first, Larry, that I must be right."

"These prove it, Andy."

"As for your running your neck into a rope, Carney, you're no good at running," said Margate, coldly addressing the other. "Otherwise, you would have worked your legs fast enough to keep out of limbo. You've come near making a mess of a good thing."

"I'm sorry, Andy, on my word," replied Carney. "But I slipped in starting, and that put me behind. I hope I have not queered it."

"I never let a job of mine be queered," Margate said, with sinister assurance. "I can see my way clear, all right, but we must get in our work more quickly than if these infernal sleuths had not turned up."

"Who d'ye think is on the case?" growled Trent, who had been making Patsy doubly secure with a cord around his elbows.

"I dunno," said Carney, turning to him. "Who?"

"Nick Carter."

"The devil he is!" Carney gasped, staring.

"Leastwise, Andy saw him in Hardy's office yesterday afternoon, and he reckoned——"

"Never mind what I reckoned, Larry, just now," Margate interrupted. "Sit this wheip against the wall and chuck some more water on him. We must find out just what Carter knows, or suspects, and what he has done. He knew me, all right, or this blooming idiot would not be here. We'll find out what more he can tell us."

"You'll get fat and juicy on that," thought Patsy, intensely disgusted with the unfortunate turn of affairs. "There'll be nothing in denying my identity, for that cold-blooded guy is right. But if he gets anything more out of me, he'll do it with a corkscrew."

Another splash of cold water broke Patsy's train of thought, indulged in while the two lesser rascals sat him against one of the kitchen walls. He did not want it repeated. He opened his eyes, therefore, and said curtly, gazing from one to the other:

"Cut that! I'm not on a water diet. What do you ginks take me for?"

"Great guns! He's a long ways from dead," growled Carney.

Larry Trent laughed loudly.

But Margate waved both of them aside, taking a chair directly opposite the detective and coldly eying him.

"We know for what we have taken you," he said icily. "We know who you are, too."

"Well, you've got nothing on me, Mr. Margate, as far as that goes," Patsy coolly retorted.

"Ah, you admit that you know me, then!"

"That's what. You are pretty well known and widely mugged in two countries."

"I see," Margate drawled, with a sneer. "I was right. Carter did recognize me. He has told you about me."

"I didn't need much telling," Patsy said dryly, in no mood to hide his feelings.

"Nor did I," retorted Margate. "I suspected the trick he might attempt to turn, and you found us ready for you."

"Yes, I'm wise to that, now, without being told."

"And you're going to put me wise to something."

"Am I?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I guess I could put you wise to some few things you don't know," Patsy dryly allowed.

"That's just what I want," said Margate, with a threatening nod. "What case is Carter on in Washington?"

"Give it up," said Patsy. "You'll have to ask him."

"Does that mean that you'll not inform me?"

"Take it any old way you like."

"I'll find a way to make you."

"You bet we will," snarled Trent, seizing a poker and starting to thrust it into the stove. "A red-hot iron will open your mouth. That's what you'll get, too, unless——"

"Keep quiet, Larry," interrupted Margate, thrusting him aside. "There'll be time enough for that. I'll get the truth from him while you are gone."

"Gone where?"

"We must not let Carter head off our game, now that we're dead sure that he is on to Carney and the trick we served Dillon," Margate forcibly explained. "He may be wise to even more than that, and we must warn Dillon and Esterveldt of their danger. We must put them on their guard against Carter, at least, until we can land them and get the blunt for the picture book. Better a small loaf than no loaf at all, now that Carter is butting into this game."

"But he——"

"There's nothing else to it, Larry, and we must lose no time," Margate said, interrupting. "Come out here, both of you, and take my instructions. We shall be left on the rocks, stranded like three old hulks, if Carter gets in his work ahead of us. Come into the entry and take my instructions."

There was a mingling of quiet energy and threatening determination in this man that told plainly enough that he would brook no opposition, nor did either of his confederates offer any. They followed him into the dim basement entry, where for several minutes the three knaves held a whispered discussion.

Patsy saw plainly that Margate was much the most capable and dangerous of the three. No less keen a knave would have suspected Nick's ruse and laid such a trap for him, or an assistant. Patsy writhed inwardly under the turn of affairs, but was forced to admit that he was powerless for the moment, at least.

Listening intently, he could hear only the faint, earnest whispers of the men in the entry. These were presently followed by the hurried steps of Trent and Carney, when both ran up the stairs and quickly left the house.

Margate returned to the kitchen and resumed his seat. He drew a revolver and shifted it to the side pocket of his fashionable sack coat. He eyed Patsy in silence for several moments, with his thin lips curled with a sneer, and he then said deliberately, with ominous quietude:

"Now, young man, I'll see whether you'll become communicative. We'll talk this over without interruptions."

"That's good enough for me," Patsy coolly asserted. "I'm right here to do my share of the talking—if the subject suits me."

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN DILLON'S VISITOR.

It was about half past ten when Patsy Garvan heard Carney and Larry Trent hurry out of the house in which he found himself effectively trapped.

Less than half an hour later a rather roughly clad man with bearded face and rounded shoulders, a face and figure denoting that he was well along in years, passed the Carnegie Library and crossed Vernon Square, and a few minutes later fell to sizing up an apartment house in a neighboring street.

It was one of those attractive places of the kind with which Washington abounded, a double rise of flats entered from a neatly trimmed front yard, with well-shaded grounds on either side of the ivy-grown brick edifice.

The ground-floor flat on one side was occupied by a solitary and exclusive tenant, the ex-army officer, Captain Casper Dillon. He kept no servants and had very few visitors. He was lounging in his library, clad in a smoking jacket and absorbed in the morning newspapers, when his bell rang.

He glanced through the partly open French window, which overlooked the side grounds and a walk leading around to the rear door. He could not see who was in the front vestibule.

He arose, pausing for a moment, and then took a revolver from the table drawer and slipped it into his hip pocket.

Striding through the hall, he opened the front door and gazed a bit sharply at his caller—the bearded man with rounded shoulders.

"Well, sir?" he said shortly.

"I'm sent here to see Captain Dillon, sir," said the visitor, with subdued and husky voice. "Is he at home this morning?"

"He is seldom at home to strangers," Captain Dillon replied, with sharper scrutiny. "What is your business?"

"I'm sent to tell only him, sir, no one else," was the reply. "Here is my card, sir—Michael Rohan, sir. If he is at home, would you say this much to him: It's about what happened a few nights back. That's all I can say, sir."

Captain Dillon's brows knit closer, but his searching scrutiny had proved ineffective. His visitor's respectful air, his manifest humility, his evident aim to follow instructions that had been given him—these so plainly denoted that he was acting for others and had no aggressive intentions, that Captain Dillon was completely deceived.

"You may come in, my man," he said curtly, stepping back to admit him and then closing the door. "Come into the library. I will hear what you have to say."

Rohan followed him, removing his cap and gingerly taking a chair to which the ex-army officer pointed, one near a cloth-topped library table in the middle of the room. He laid his cap on it, and appeared to feel out of his element amid such superior surroundings.

Captain Dillon noticed it, and his frown relaxed. He sat down at the opposite side of the table, gazing across it and saying:

"Your name is Rohan, is it?"

"Yes, sir. Michael Rohan, sir," said he huskily.

"Who sent you here?"

"I'm to see Captain Dillon, sir; no one else. If——"

"I am Captain Dillon."

"Oh, is that so, sir?" Rohan asked, gazing. "I ought to have known it, mebbe. Who else is here, sir?"

"Nobody," Captain Dillon said curtly. "I live alone in this flat. Come to the point, my man. What do you want of me?"

"I'm not after wanting anything, sir," replied Rohan, drawing nearer the table. "It's them that sent me."

"Who are they? Why did they send you?"

"I'm not to mention any names, sir. I'm sent here only to tell you what they want—and to find out what you are willing to give up for it."

Captain Dillon turned wary. He was not a man to be easily led into a trap. He frowned again, saying a bit sternly:

"You must be more explicit, Mr. Rohan. I'm not good at guessing riddles. I don't know at what you're driving."

"You don't, eh?" Rohan's eyes took on a curious leer.

"I certainly do not," Dillon insisted.

"You was beat up a few nights back, wasn't you?"

"Yes, by two cowardly thugs."

"Three, sir, was the number," said Rohan. "But that don't matter. You lost something, didn't you?"

"A small quantity of blood—nothing more."

Rohan spread his arms on the table and lurched a little nearer.

"Tell that to the marines, sir," said he, with a sinister nod. "You know what I mean, sir, and I know you know it. You'd better meet me halfway, too, Captain Dillon, or I might as well take myself out the way I came in. You've nothing to fear from me, sir, and I don't fear you. I wasn't one of the three, and I can prove it—but I came from them. If there is nothing doing, sir, I'll go back and tell them so."

Michael Rohan appeared about to do so, in fact, but Dillon checked him with a gesture.

"Stop a moment," said he. "What do your rascally friends want?"

"Money," said Rohan shortly.

"For what?"

"For what you lost that night."

"How much money?"

"All that you'll give. That's what I'm to find out."

"But I don't know you, Rohan, from a side of leather," Captain Dillon said, with a growl. "What evidence have I that you were sent by those three scoundrels? I'm not buying a cat in a bag, nor dealing with any known agent. You may, for all I know, be a detective in disguise."

Rohan shrugged his rounded shoulders and grinned derisively.

"There's nothing in that, sir," said he. "I can give you proof enough."

Captain Dillon's squinted eyes took on a gleam of eagerness.

"What proof?" he demanded.

"You're alone here, you say?" Rohan glanced around again toward the hall and bedrooms.

"Yes, on my word," Dillon earnestly declared.

"Got a gun on you? Stand up, sir, and lift your jacket."

"I have one," Dillon admitted.

"Lock it in a drawer," said Rohan. "Mind you, sir, I'm not to be held up, and I'm not to hold any one up. I only want a square deal."

Dillon placed the revolver in a drawer, turning the key and tossing it upon the table. That he anticipated what the proof was to be, despite his pretended ignorance, was betrayed by the eager light in his narrow eyes.

"Now, Mr. Rohan, come to the point," said he, settling back in his chair. "Where are your credentials? What proof have you?"

"Proof enough, sir," said Rohan. "The thing you lost."

"Have you brought it here?"

"I have, sir."

"Let me see it."

Rohan arose and thrust his hands up under the back of his coat. The hump between his shoulders disappeared. He drew out a black leather portfolio and placed it on the table.

"There 'tis, sir," said he; then added quickly: "But don't get gay. I'm to take it back when I go, and I'm going to do it. I've got a gun, sir, and——"

"Enough of that," Dillon interrupted, eyes glowing. "You'll need no gun, Rohan, if that portfolio contains what I hope. I will pay any price for them that you rascals can reasonably ask. But I must see them—must be convinced."

Rohan snapped the two buckles that secured the folded flap of the portfolio.

He thrust in his hand and drew out, not blank papers, which the dummy portfolio had contained—but a quantity of genuine government plans.

"Have a look, sir," he said indifferently. "It's up to you."

An irrepressible cry of exultation broke from Dillon. He lurched forward to the table, quivering with eagerness and excitement, and with both hands outstretched to seize the plans and examine them.

Rohan's hands fell at the same moment. As quick as a flash, in the hundredth part of a second, he snapped handcuffs on the wrists of the recreant army officer. Then he arose, sweeping off his disguise and saying sternly:

"Let the plans lie there, Captain Dillon."

"Oh, my God!" Dillon fell back with a terrible cry. "Nick Carter!"

"Yes. Let them lie. I had Mr. Garland get them for me from his department this morning. They are not the plans you stole and lost, but they have served my purpose. You are under arrest, Captain Dillon, as a traitor to your country and a conspirator with foreign spies."

Captain Dillon had collapsed as if his last ounce of strength had left him—his last drop of blood, in fact, for he looked like a corpse in the great armchair into which he had fallen. He did not speak, could not have spoken; but an interruption, a most unexpected one, came from another.

The stern words scarce had left the lips of the detective, when, through the partly open French window, entering with the swift stealthy and sinuous movements of a leopard, Irma Valaska darted into the room.

Her face was ghastly, her lips gray and drawn, her eyes ablaze as if all that was devilish in her nature was concentrated in their fiery depths.

Nick Carter did not see her until, hearing her fierce, sibilant voice, he swung round and found himself gazing into the deadly muzzle of a leveled revolver.

"You're wrong! He's not under arrest!" Irma Valaska cried, with terrible intensity. "Throw up your hands, Nick Carter. Up with them—or there'll be a corpse where you are standing."

Nick did not pause for an instant. No sane man looking into her drawn, determined face, would have ignored the murderous light in the woman's eyes.

Nick fell back a step and threw up his hands.

Irma Valaska came nearer to him. Plainly enough, she feared him no more than a wild cat fears a rabbit.

"Don't drop them!" she cried, between her teeth. "I'll fire if you lower them an inch. You devil of a Carter! You would foil my designs, eh? Oh, I know you—I know you! I know all. You move foot or finger and I will kill you."

"You look quite capable of it," said Nick calmly.

"I am!" she cried. "I would rather than not. But there will be time for that—time for that! Move quickly, Casper, while I keep him covered. Get your revolver. Cover him while I get his weapons and keys. I'll have those things off your wrists. The baron is coming. He will aid us. We shall fool this devil Carter, and spit in his face. Be quick, Casper, be quick!"

There was no need whatever for so vehement a bidding. Dillon had seized upon life anew the instant he saw her and the complete change in the situation. He caught up the key from his table and opened the drawer in which he had placed his revolver. He had it in his hand and was on his feet, white and vengeful, before Irma Valaska had ceased speaking.

In view of the several irons he had in the fire, and the value he placed on a whole skin, Nick Carter did not think it worth while to invite so ready a bullet by attempting any absurdly desperate move.

Smiling indifferently, he permitted Irma Valaska to hold the ribbons for a time.

CHAPTER IX.

CHICK CARTER'S QUEST.

There were, reasons, of course, for the swift sequence of sensational episodes of that morning, as there are reasons why the maelstrom so fiercely swirls on certain tides. There is always turbulence and violence when strong tides meet.

It was after nine o'clock when Chick Carter approached the rented home of the Baron Esterveldt and his wife, as well as the beautiful snake who was posing as their orphan relative.

It was, as Garland had said to Nick, a most attractive place. A stately stone residence well in from the street, with an environment of beautiful grounds, shaded with fine old trees and adorned with ornamental shrubbery. Rounded and perfectly kept driveways led to a stable and a commodious garage, beyond which a stone wall divided the estate from a rear street.

Chick turned his steps in that direction after sauntering by the front of the house, taking the opposite side of the fashionable street. He could see no one at any of the windows, many of which were partly open for ventilation at that hour of the morning.

Upon entering the back street, however, where the wall and considerable intervening shrubbery served to conceal him, he obtained a good view of the back of the house, and he then discovered the two persons he was chiefly seeking.

The sunshine lay warm and bright on a broad rear veranda. In one of several large willow chairs was seated the massive, bearded man whom Nick had seen in the restaurant the previous night, and afterward described to his assistants. He was reading a morning newspaper.

Walking to and fro as if for exercise, Irma Valaska also was plainly seen, with her hands clasped behind her and her graceful, sinuous figure clad in a close-fitting blue street costume. Madame Valaska always made it a point to be prepared for the street at a moment's notice. It was the precaution of conscious peril.

"By Jove, there they are," thought Chick, when his gaze fell upon them. "That big fellow must be the Baron Esterveldt. There's no question as to the identity of the woman. If anything comes off here this morning, it's a safe gamble that one or both of them will figure in it. Having got my eye on them, therefore, I'll find a concealment from which I can safely watch them."

Chick did not find it difficult to do so. Cautiously scaling the wall near one corner of the rear grounds, he found a shelter back of a thick hedge dividing the estate from that adjoining it, a point enabling him to easily see the house and the entire rear grounds.

"Now, by Jove, I'm ready for whatever turns up," he said to himself. "If Nick is right, and it's long odds that he is not far from the truth, there ought to be something doing this morning."

Nearly two hours passed, however, before his vigil was rewarded.

The Baron Esterveldt had, in the meantime, finished reading his newspaper. He lingered briefly to talk with his companion, then arose ponderously and entered the house.

Chick was too far away to hear anything that passed between them, but their earnestness during the brief conversation convinced him that they were anxious and apprehensive.

Left alone on the veranda, Irma Valaska took the chair the man had vacated and began to read the newspaper he had left for her.

Something like a quarter hour passed, and then the ball began rolling in earnest.

Glancing toward the back street, Chick discovered a man moving cautiously near the wall, pausing at intervals to gaze over it in the direction of the house, and acting in a way much too suspicious to be disregarded.

This man was, as may be inferred, Larry Trent.

Chick changed his position slightly in order to watch him.

Presently Trent arrived at a point nearly back of the garage, and he then discovered the woman seated on the veranda. He at once leaped over the wall and darted behind the garage, from which nearer point he gazed out at her.

"The game is opening, all right," thought Chick, who was some fifty yards from the garage, that being on the opposite side of the grounds. "But who the deuce is the fellow? He appears to know the woman by sight, at least, yet fears for some reason to approach her. By Jove, he may be one of the crooks who assaulted Dillon and got away with the portfolio. He may have seen Irma Valaska in the touring car that evening, and in other respects a stranger to her."

This was confirmed almost within a moment, and it gave Chick a further hint at what might be in the wind.

Larry Trent stepped out from a rear corner of the garage and whistled to the woman.

Irma Valaska looked up quickly and saw him. She dropped her paper, gazing curiously at him, and Trent beckoned for her to join him.

The woman hesitated only for a moment. She seemed to anticipate why she was wanted. She threw aside the newspaper, then hurried down the veranda stairs and out over the driveway.

Chick Carter then saw plainly that they met like strangers.

For about five minutes they stood talking with intense earnestness, Trent doing most of it and frequently pointing and gesticulating emphatically, and all the while Irma Valaska listened with a steadily deepening frown.

Suddenly they parted, and the woman ran back to the house.

Trent darted to the wall and hurried through the back street.

Chick Carter came to a quick decision—that he would follow the man.

What little he had seen convinced him that Trent was back of, or at least directing, whatever business was to be done that morning.

Chick crept from his concealment, therefore, and within half a minute was on the track of the man.

If he had waited about three minutes, he would have seen Irma Valaska rush out to the garage again, from which she quickly sped away alone in an electric runabout.

She had been warned in accord with the instructions of Andy Margate, and she was away at top speed to confer with Captain Casper Dillon.

Upon stopping in front of this house, however, she became habitually crafty and discreet. Instead of ringing the doorbell, she stole in over the side path leading to the rear door and by the partly open French window, at which she arrived just in time to hear the conclusion of Nick Carter's interview with Dillon, with the result already depicted.

Hardly a minute later, Tom Carney approached the house, bent upon warning Dillon, as Trent already had warned Irma Valaska. Carney saw the runabout in front of the house. He became discreet, also, and crept into the yard and nearly to the French window.

Turning a near corner three minutes later, still in pursuit of Larry Trent, Chick Carter saw the two men meet in front of the house. He drew back and watched them. He saw the runabout, but he had no reason to suppose that it had brought Irma Valaska to the house, nor did he then know that it was where Captain Dillon lived, or that Nick might be there.

Trent and Carney talked in earnest whispers for several moments, then both hurried away.

Chick's suspicions were redoubled, and he now proceeded to shadow both.

The two men proceeded posthaste to the dwelling in which they had left Andy Margate and Patsy Garvan.

Chick paused in the narrow street after they had disappeared into the court, and began to size up the inferior house and its surroundings. He wondered why they had come there. He decided to get a look at the rear of the house, but he did not steal into the court, as Patsy had done. Instead, he entered an adjoining yard, that of an express stable, and he scarce had passed back of the fence dividing it from the dwelling, when he heard the voices of the men just leaving the house.

Quickly peering through a crack in the board fence, moreover, he saw Andy Margate and recognized him.

Margate was speaking in his characteristic cold and confident fashion while the three men passed out of the rear yard and through the alley.

"There'll be time enough, if the woman has held him up and Dillon got the bracelets on him," he was saying, every word of which was plainly heard by the listening detective. "We can make a deal with them and get a good bit of coin, and then we'll bolt for other parts. I have fixed that whelp in the kitchen so that he can't escape and queer our game. He'll stay till we return, and——"

Chick Carter could hear no more, nor needed to hear more. He knew well enough, now, at whose house the runabout had stopped, whom it had brought there, and what probably had occurred.

Chick knew, too, knowing what Patsy's mission had been that morning, to what whelp Andy Margate had referred.

Chick waited only until the three men had vanished down the street, and he then clambered over the fence

and into the yard back of the house. He did not stand upon ceremony after having assured himself with a few swift glances that the house was deserted—barring its one captive occupant. He beat out a pane of one of the kitchen windows with his revolver, then entered the room and—found Patsy Garvan, gagged and bound, hand and foot, on the floor of a small closet.

Though their meeting was an exultant one, and Patsy's surprise all that may be imagined, they spent but little time in congratulations. A very few words, moreover, told each what had been learned by the other, as well as how the situation then stood.

"Gee! there's nothing to it," said Patsy finally. "We can reach Dillon's house nearly as quickly as those three fellows. We can nail the entire gang."

"Stop a bit," Chick objected. "If they are going to attempt making a deal with Dillon and the woman, there will be time enough for us."

"Time for what?" questioned Patsy.

"Time to search this house," said Chick. "It evidently is where the crooks have been quartered. We may find what we want."

CHAPTER X.

A DESPERATE MOVE.

It was nearly noon.

Less than three hours had passed since Nick Carter and his two assistants set to work on that eventful morning.

There was a change in the scene in Captain Casper Dillon's library.

Nick Carter was seated in one of the large chairs near the wall, tied to it and with his arms secured behind him. His strong, clean-cut face, nevertheless, wore an expression of absolute indifference. He sat listening without concern to the discussion that was in progress.

There was another prominent figure in it at that time. He was seated near the library table, on which still lay the plans Nick had brought there, and the safety of which was all that then gave him any uneasiness. This figure was that of the Baron Esterveldt, who had followed Irma Valaska there in a touring car, then directed his chauffeur to return home.

The woman, one of Europe's cleverest spies, then was seated near him.

Captain Dillon had been liberated, of course, and was in nervous exultation over the less threatening turn of affairs.

There then were three other persons in the room—Andy Margate, Tom Carney, and Larry Trent.

They had arrived upon the scene ten minutes before. The forces that had been in operation had come together, had united for the first time, and explanations formed a part of the discussion, conducted almost entirely by the Baron Esterveldt and Margate.

"Never mind how I came to know of your designs," Margate was saying to the other just as a French clock on the mantel struck twelve. "That's neither here nor there. All that we need come to is a settlement of the matter as it stands."

"What do you consider a settlement?" Esterveldt demanded, with sonorous voice.

"That can be told with few words," returned Margate coldly.

"Brevity is desirable under the circumstances," said Esterveldt, with a sneer.

It was ignored by Margate.

"There is just this much to it," he went on icily: "I have in my possession certain articles for which you people have conspired. They are intact, just as we found them when Captain Dillon reluctantly parted with them."

Dillon scowled darkly, but did not interrupt.

"We will return them to you for a price," Margate continued. "What that sum shall be, and when the deal can be completed, are the only two questions to be settled."

"Ah, indeed?" queried Esterveldt, frowning. "What about this detective and his assistant, the one you say is in your hands?"

"You may dispose of them as you please, Baron Esterveldt," Margate said coldly. "I can imagine that your subsequent safety will permit of only one course."

"There is some truth in that."

"What you do with them is immaterial to me," added Margate. "Carter is too dangerous a man for me to leave alive, if I were the one seriously threatened. That, however, will be up to you."

"We can take care of him," snapped Irma Valaska, with a fiery glance at the unruffled detective. "We'll be sure to close his mouth."

"Possibly."

Nick dropped in the single doubtful word indifferently.

"A settlement, then, should be easily arrived at," said Margate, resuming. "As a matter of fact, so far as I and my two friends here are concerned, there is nothing else to it. There is nothing——"

"Oh, yes, there is! There is much more to it!"

The interruption, one that turned the scene into a tumult, was shouted from outside.

It was followed by the crash of the French window, through which came Chick Carter and Patsy Garvan, weapons drawn and with four policemen at their heels.

Others were battering down the back door.

Others were stationed at the front.

A shout of satisfaction from Nick Carter was drowned by a roar of dismay from the Baron Esterveldt, a shriek of mingled fear and fury from Irma Valaska, and oaths and imprecations from knaves instantly involved in a vain but terrific struggle.

Only one man succeeded in making a move for liberty—Andy Margate.

He sprang through the parlor door, as quick as a cat and defiant of the bullet that whizzed by his head. Two bounds took him across the room. He did not seek the front door of the house, knowing it must be guarded.

Without an instant's hesitation, a devil indeed when cornered, he leaped straight through a side window, carrying away panes and sashes, and alighted in the side yard.

Two policemen in the front yard tried to stop him.

Margate dodged them, cleared the front fence cleanly, and in an instant was in the runabout Irma Valaska had left at the curbing. He uttered a defiant yell and was away in a moment.

Patsy Garvan rushed out of the house in time to fire twice, only to miss the crouching rascal, and in another moment the speeding car had turned the nearest corner.

At one o'clock that afternoon, Nick Carter, in company with Chick and Patsy, knocked on the door of a suite in the Willard and waited for the occupant to

open it. There was an odd smile on the face of the famous detective, an odd smile on that of each of his companions. The light in their eyes was one that never shone on land or sea.

They had not long to wait, scarce a moment. Well enough the man in the suite knew that only one person would be likely to knock on his door, that only Nick Carter and his assistants knew that he was there.

Harold Garland, as anxious and distressed as if his life was at stake, ran to the door and opened it.

"Ah!" said Nick, smiling. "I thought you might be at lunch."

He had an overcoat on his arm when he entered with his assistants, and he placed it on a table in the parlor.

"Lunch!" Garland echoed the word derisively. "Heaven above! will I ever eat again, Carter?"

"Well, I hope so," said Nick, laughing.

"Do you laugh at me?" Garland stood and stared. "Tell me——"

"Oh, I haven't much to tell you, Captain Garland. I came near losing those plans you brought me from the war office this morning."

"Losing them!" Garland spoke with a gasp. "God above! that would be heaping Pelion upon Ossa. If you had lost them, also——"

"Oh, but I didn't," said Nick.

"Where are they, then, and——"

"Have a look."

Nick picked up his overcoat and revealed on the table—two portfolios stuffed with government plans.

Garland stared for an instant, then uttered a shriek that might have been heard a mile away—a shriek imbued with joy and relief that words could not describe. He tore open both, viewed their contents for a moment, and then he threw his arms around the detective, sobbing like a child and crying wildly:

"Oh, Carter, Carter, Carter, how am I to repay you? They are all here, all here! Both portfolios—every plan! Oh, my God, I think I'm going daffy!"

"Let it be with delight, then," said Nick, kindly forcing him to a chair. "We have called the turn on the foreign spies, at least, and put them where they belong. They have learned nothing from these plans, moreover, and you can bank safely on that, Garland, to the day of judgment. Calm yourself and listen. I will tell you what we have done and where you now stand."

Nick then told him what had transpired that morning; of the finding of the stolen portfolio by Chick and Patsy; of the subsequent arrest of the Baron Esterveldt and his confederates, and the imprisonment of the entire gang, with the exception of Andy Margate.

"But we shall get him later," Nick added, after thrilling Garland with the entirely favorable outcome of the case. "The others will get all that is coming to them, and are as good as booked for long terms in a Federal prison. As for Andy Margate, he is a clever and elusive crook. I have wormed out of Trent that he got an inkling of this job before leaving Europe, and that he came over here to take advantage of it. He did not know just what it was, but he kept an eye on Madame Valaska and discovered her friendliness with you. He saw you only by chance when you were met by her at the Union Station, Trent and Carney being with him, and they saw her slip the portfolio to Dillon, then in disguise, just before the touring car started. Dillon passed by the car to receive it, and Margate at once suspected its value. They waylaid him later, and—well, that's the whole story. But he will not escape. We'll get him later, Garland, take my word for it. We'll get Andy Margate a little later."

Nick Carter's prediction proved to be correct.

THE END.

How Nick Carter's prediction was fulfilled will be told in "Paying the Price; or, Nick Carter's Perilous Venture," the long, complete story which you will find in the next issue, No. 146, of the NICK CARTER STORIES, out June 26th. The further adventures of the celebrated detective and his two famous assistants in their efforts to run down Andy Margate is related in a most graphic manner. Then, too, there is the usual installment of the serial now running, together with several other interesting bits of information.

Where's the Commandant?

By C. C. WADDELL.

(This interesting story was commenced in No. 140 of NICK CARTER STORIES. Back numbers can always be obtained from your news dealer or the publishers.)

CHAPTER XXII.

AN OFFER.

Stupefied at such a refined and gratuitous exhibition of malevolence, Grail seemed suddenly to awake at the words, straining at the cords about his limbs, striving desperately to slip the gag, if only to utter a single word. But his efforts were absolutely in vain. Head, trunk, hands, feet were held immovable as in a vise; not a sound could he force past his mute lips.

Instead, Rezonoff bent down close beside him, and in such an excellent imitation of Grail's tones that one could scarcely doubt it came from him, flung after the gray-haired commandant a peal of derisive and insulting laughter. Then, the interlude over, he gave directions to relax the bonds on the prisoners, and remove them once more inside the hut.

"I am obliged to leave now to accompany your friend the colonel," he approached Grail to say, "and must defer the definite settlement of your case until to-morrow. Before I go, though, I wish to leave one thought with you to ponder over. I have, of course, no ground for animosity against you and your companion, other than that you have seen fit to poke your nose into my affairs; under certain conditions I am willing to overlook.

"In short, my dear captain"—he lighted a cigarette—"as you are doubtless aware, I am interested in the wireless experiments which have been conducted out at the fort, and for detailed information in regard to them, am prepared to offer you your liberty."

Grail made him no answer.

"Ah!" The other laughed. "I know what you are thinking. You do not believe that I will carry out my end of the bargain. But consider: Even with all the precautions I may take, every death increases my risk and danger; for, despite the proverb, dead men do tell tales. Then, too, I would have no fear of your talking; the transaction with me would be all-sufficient to seal your lips forever. No,

my offer is bona fide, captain; you may rely on it. Indeed, I will do even more. With your acceptance, I will guarantee to exonerate you fully from all the suspicion now directed against you at the fort. And I can do it, too."

Grail broke his silence. "And the alternative," he demanded, "if I refuse?"

"The alternative?" The Russian lifted his cigarette to his lips and blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "Deplorable for you, my dear captain, but inevitable."

"I shall kill you, Rezonoff," said Grail, in a low tone. "I shall kill you if ever I have the opportunity."

"I suppose," the other returned, "that means a refusal of my offer, eh, captain? Well, I shall not take it as final now. You shall have twenty-four hours to think it over."

Then, with a glance at his watch, he turned on his heel, and strode from the hut; and a few minutes later the prisoners heard the chug-chug of his automobile as it sped away.

Grail and Sergeant Cato glanced furtively at one another, the same thought mirrored in the eyes of each. They had a respite of twenty-four hours to go on, it seemed, and in twenty-four hours much can be accomplished.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VAIN EFFORTS.

Of the five confederates who had been at the hut with Rezonoff, two—Vance and Minowsky—accompanied him in the automobile, while Pepernik, under his orders, returned to the rooming house to serve as a "stalking horse" against the police, and lead them off the trail.

This left Matschka and Simmons to guard the prisoners, each man taking a relief of three hours, with Matschka accepting the first turn at sentry duty.

It was a period of quiet in the hut, broken only by the mutterings and tossings of Simmons as he slept somewhat restlessly, rolled up in a blanket over in the corner.

Matschka, silently alert, sat on a box smoking innumerable cigarettes, but never letting his glance drift from the captives, who shifted about uneasily in the effort to relieve the chafing of the cords at their wrists and ankles, the while they feverishly revolved methods of escape.

One conclusion was very speedily reached by both of them: That it would not be wise to make the attempt under the eye of their present sentinel. He steadfastly declined to be drawn into conversation by them, or to have his attention diverted in any way, and his discernment was almost uncanny. Let one or the other of them feel even the slightest slackening of his bonds, and immediately Matschka was there to tighten up the knots.

They soon decided, therefore, to defer active measures until Simmons took the watch, and in the meantime devote all their energies to devising an effective plan of escape.

Eagerly each sought to recall all the tales of the old Indian fighters which are handed down in the service, with their details of almost miraculous deliverance from similar situations, but none of the expedients used seemed adaptable to their present plight.

Many prisoners, bound hand and foot, have managed even under the watchful eyes of a guard to extricate themselves from their fetters and get away; but it has always been due, Grail gloomily reflected, to some slip-up or oversight on the part of their captors—a pocketknife overlooked in the search of the prisoner's person, a carelessly tied knot, or a convenient sharp stone against which to fray the rope. With them, however, no such fortuitous circumstance existed so far as Grail could see; and he was satisfied from Cato's expression that his companion was equally baffled by their plight.

They were simply tied up hard and fast, and in such thorough and scientific fashion that to slip or unloose their fastenings with any one watching them was practically an impossibility. Nevertheless, Grail did not despair. There must be some way out of the dilemma, he believed, and industriously he set himself to find it.

So the time passed away, with both Cato and him vainly cudgeling their brains, until at last four o'clock arrived, and with it Matschka roused up Simmons and himself rolled over into the blanket.

The deserter yawned, stretched himself, and walked over to the door, to gaze out into the gray morning mists which enveloped the bottoms.

"B-r-r!" he muttered, shivering from the chill dampness as he returned to take his seat on the box. "That air is as cold and clammy as the touch of a dead man's hand."

Cato, seeing evidence of a desire to talk in this, promptly encouraged it.

"Feeling seedy, anyhow, aren't you?" he said. "You didn't seem to be sleeping very well."

"Sleep?" Simmons laughed harshly. "I haven't been seeing anything but the staring eyes of that yellow-faced Jap all night long." He shivered again.

"Never killed a man, did you, sarge?" he resumed, after a pause. "Well, don't! Believe me, it's a nasty business—kind of turns you sick, when they crumple up and flop down all limp, like that Jap did on the stairs. And that straw hat of his!" he exclaimed. "It sounded to me like a load of brick, bumping from step to step, clean to the bottom. I couldn't understand why everybody in the house didn't come running out to see what was the matter.

"What else could I do, though?" he burst out in a sort of petulant defense. "As I told the boss, I had to get him, or he'd have got the whole shooting match of us. It was just the same way with Captain Grail there. I hadn't nothing against him in the world, but I knew where he was going when he ordered out the dirigible, and it was up to me to stop him any way I could. Take it from me, though," he added, "the Jap had us nearer right than even Captain Grail. He had the whole thing figured down to detailed plans and specifications."

"How did he come to let you get him, then?" inquired Cato, noticing out of the corner of his eye that Grail was slowly working one foot free.

"Ah, that was where I worked it fine!" Simmons boastfully wagged his head. "Them little brown fellows is smooth, sarge, but for once I was just a shade smoother. You see, when I started on my get-away, I headed straight for Matschka's room to make my change; and as I bolted into the house and up the stairs, who should I see but this Sasaku just coming out. I knew he'd recognize me from the way he dived back into his room; but I pretended not to notice anything, and went on up to Matschka's joint. That was a sort of general hang-out for the crowd, you understand, and all of us had a key to the door."

"Yes," interposed the sergeant encouragingly, as he sedulously kept his glance away from Grail; "what then?"

"Let's see, where was I? Oh, sure, I remember now; I was in Matschka's, and the Jap was in his own room, across the hall. Well, I didn't lose any time skinning out of my uniform, but all the same I had my door ajar, and I kept listening, and pretty soon, just as I expected, I heard him come sneaking over to get an eyeful. I acted like I hadn't a suspicion in the world, but I was saying to myself: 'If that guy ever gets out and telephones to Grail that he's seen me here, I'll be doing a stretch at Leavenworth sure,' and all the while I was opening the knife in my pocket. Then, when I heard his steps turn away from the door, and head for the stairs, I turned like a flash and was after him. The door was open a crack, as I told you, and I had on rubber soles, so he never heard me. I caught him just at the top step, and let him have it between the shoulder blades, and he went down without even a squeak. Then I grabbed a letter that he had in his hand, and blew."

"A letter?" repeated Cato. "To whom?"

"To Captain Grail. And, believe me, it was some letter, too. The chief was inclined to be peevish when I got over here, and told him what I'd done. But you bet he didn't have another word to say after he'd taken a squint at that letter. The Jap had the whole game doped out, with all our names and everything else; and he——"

"Hello, there!" he exclaimed sharply, happening unfortunately to turn just as Grail was slipping his foot free from its tether. "Oh, no; I guess you won't!" And, diving forward, he speedily retied the confining knots more securely than ever. An hour and a half's patient effort had gone for naught.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEW TACTICS.

From that time on, Simmons redoubled his vigilance; and at seven o'clock the taciturn and lynx-eyed Matschka returned to the job.

Grail had hoped that possibly their opportunity would come at breakfast, but in this he was destined to be disappointed. Only one of them was permitted to eat at a time, a single arm being freed sufficiently to allow them to feed themselves, and the big Russian standing warily at hand to check the first suspicious movement.

Moreover, since it was not deemed wise to draw attention by starting a fire in the shack, the repast consisted solely of cold bread and meat, and no table implements which might have proved of some service were handed out.

The day wore on in a succession of frustrated hopes. Ten o'clock brought Simmons on as sentinel again, but, warned by his previous experience, he was, if no less loquacious, decidedly more watchful. The end of his shift at one o'clock found the prisoners as far as ever from a solution of their problem, and the time at their disposal half gone.

Practically their sole hope lay now in what scheme they could frame up to circumvent Simmons when he again came on from four to seven; and Grail by this time had about come to the conclusion that Simmons was almost as difficult to circumvent as Matschka.

Perhaps, however, came the thought, he could be won or brought over to their aid. The deserter had dropped one or two remarks which rather indicated that he was not altogether satisfied with the bargain he had made, and was chafing under the autocratic rule of his Muscovite employer.

Recalling these symptoms of discontent, and reflecting, too, that Simmons would no doubt sell out his present associates as readily as he had the former ones, the adjutant set himself to pondering the arguments and promises which he considered would prove most persuasive.

By a stroke of luck, he had an opportunity to use them sooner than he had expected.

About two o'clock, Minowsky appeared with a message from their leader directing Matschka to return to Brentford, and surrender himself to the police.

"All you've got to do, he says," explained the emissary, "is to stick to it that you don't know Simmons, and that, if he used your room, it was entirely without your knowledge or consent. They haven't got any real evidence against you, and the worst you can get, the chief says, in a couple of days behind the bars. Anyhow, you've got to do it, he says, to throw off the detectives. While they're busy trying to get something out of you, they won't be poking around in the other directions, and maybe stumbling onto something that would hurt."

The big Russian, trained to military obedience, did not hesitate, or even question the order. With an indifferent grunt, he arose, and at once prepared to accompany the other back to town.

Left thus alone in charge of Simmons, Grail lost no time in commencing his overtures; and Cato, promptly scenting what was in the wind, ably seconded his efforts.

For a time, Simmons paid little heed to them. He was busy poring over a newspaper which Minowsky had brought, and from his unhappy expression it was evident that he was far from pleased with what he read.

Finally, he cast the sheet from him, and sat nursing his knees in moody silence.

"By golly, it begins to look to me like I was picked for the goat," he muttered resentfully. "What I done ain't a patch to what the rest of the crowd is up to, and it was all for their benefit, too. Yet, do they try to protect me in any way? Are they trying to hand the cops any false steer, as the chief promised they would? Naw, they ain't. Instead, this stiff of a Pepernik, when they question him, comes out and gives me the worst kind of a black eye; says he's seen me hanging around the rooming house often, and that he caught me once in his own room, being only kept from handing me over to the police by my claiming that the door was open, and I come in by mistake.

"Does that look like they was protecting me?" he demanded. "If they wanted to do what was right, would I be sitting here shivering for fear the detectives might pop in on me at any minute? No; I'd be a thousand miles away, with a good disguise on me, and plenty of money in my pocket.

"Why, how do I know"—he sprang to his feet and began excitedly pacing the floor—"but what the whole crowd is making a duck right now, and leaving me to hold the bag? Maybe this calling off Matschka is just a stall to give him a chance to blow with the rest. All the chief really wanted was to get the colonel. As he himself said, he didn't have nothing against you two."

Needless to say, Grail and Cato both sympathized with his complaints, and played upon his apprehensions, until

finally when he seemed sufficiently worked up, the adjutant made a flat-footed proposition.

"Turn State's evidence on the crowd, while you have a chance, Simmons," he urged. "Don't let them give you the worst of it. Right now you have everything in your own hands, and by telling the truth and giving up this gang to justice, you yourself will get off scot-free, or with only a few years' imprisonment at the most. To-morrow it may be too late."

With these and many other persuasions they sought to convince him; but Simmons, although manifestly impressed, still hesitated.

"I don't dare," he whimpered. "That captain told me what would happen to me if I ever turned on him. There's Russian spies all over this country, he says, and every one of them would make it his special business to hunt me down and get me. They never forget, he says, and they never give up; and, believe me, what he says they do when they finally land you is enough to make your blood run cold."

Grail almost found it in his heart to pity the poor wretch thus tossed between contrary fears; but the important thing with him, of course, was to gain his freedom, and he labored all the more assiduously to allay the dread inspired by Rezonoff's threats, and at the same time urge the advantages of coming over to the side of the law.

It was a purely commercial argument, however, which finally won the day.

"Simmons," he said abruptly, "if you will release Cato and myself immediately, I will give you a thousand dollars the moment we get back to the fort."

For a minute longer the man wavered. Then the prospect of a thousand-dollar spree in Brentford's gilded resorts overcoming even his terror of Russian vengeance, he bent over the prisoners, and began fumbling at the knots.

CHAPTER XXV.

UNEXPECTED VENGEANCE.

While he worked, Grail hurriedly plied him with questions. "Have you any idea," he asked, "where Rezonoff was planning to take the colonel when they left here last night?"

Simmons shook his head. "I don't know for sure," he said. "They didn't take me into their confidence any more than they had to. But I have a suspicion from something I heard dropped that they were planning somehow to ring the colonel's daughter into the game."

"The colonel's daughter!" Grail gulped the words out, his face grown gray and tense.

"Yes. Just before they started off, I heard him say to Vance that it would be quite a family reunion to have father and daughter under——"

The sentence was destined never to be finished. Just then a pistol shot rang out from the back of the hut, and Simmons, with a shrill cry, sprang to his feet, clutching at his left hand, from which the little finger had been shot away.

A second later he was out of the hut and dashing for the cover of the horse weeds at a speed which only terror could have lent to his feet.

Grail and Cato, owing to their cramped limbs and the necessity of jerking off the last of their trammeling cords, made slower progress; and by the time they reached the door their late companion had disappeared, the only sign of him being the rustling and swaying of the thicket as he passed through. Just entering the weeds, however, and in close pursuit, they could discern the forms of half a dozen lithe, brown-skinned little men.

Grail drew a long breath as comprehension came to him. He had not dreamed before but that the pistol shot had been aimed at Simmons by one of the returning Russians.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "The danger that he did not count is the one to overtake him—the vengeance of the Japs for the murder of their countryman. As he himself said, they are deep—deep and crafty—those little people; and no doubt they have been seeking him ever since they learned that he was the murderer of Sasaku. Also, unquestionably, they would shadow the men with whom he was associated; and thus, through Minowsky's coming here this afternoon, they learned of his hiding place.

"But come," he urged, laying a hand on Cato's arm. "Let us hurry after them. We still may be in time to prevent bloodshed. They will certainly desist if we tell them that Simmons has decided to give himself up to the authorities."

Indeed, considering that they had been trussed up for over fifteen hours, it was really remarkable how quickly they made their way to the shore. Through the tall weeds they plunged breathlessly, never thinking of the danger they ran in possibly being mistaken for the fugitive.

As a matter of fact, though, they were led astray from the actual chase by a chance pig, which, stirred up from its comfortable wallow at their approach, drew them considerably to the north under the delusion that they were following the footsteps of Simmons, or one of his pursuers.

So, when they finally came out on the river bank, it was to see Simmons emerge from the bushes fully four hundred yards below them, and, in frenzied flight, dash down to the water's edge.

There he hesitated a second, glancing back over his shoulder; but evidently seeing the avengers hard upon his heels, threw aside his coat, and splashed into the shallows with the manifest intention of trying to escape by swimming.

A dozen steps he took, the water rising above his waist; then, just as he was about to throw himself forward and strike out, he stopped suddenly with a peculiar gesture, seemed to struggle unavailingly, and, half turning toward shore, threw up his arms with a wild scream for help.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Grail. "He's struck quicksand!" And immediately he and Cato started to run down the shore. But before they had covered half the distance they saw that they would be too late. With fearful rapidity the victim was being drawn down. Already the water was up to his chin.

A little knot of the pursuers stood on the bank, but they stirred neither hand nor foot to tender aid. In absolutely stolid silence they watched the tragedy being enacted before them. Grail tried to call to them, to explain; but they either failed to hear or declined to heed him.

So the end came. There was one last awful, gurgling cry; then silence. By the time that Cato and Grail came panting to the spot, the Japanese had disappeared, departed as quickly and silently as though they had evaporated

into air. Only a few bubbles floating on the surface of the muddy river remained to give a sign of what had happened.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DAMPENED LETTER.

Shocked and shaken by the terrible fate which had overtaken Simmons, Grail and his companion could only stand staring silently at the flowing waters; but very shortly they aroused themselves from their stunned apathy.

Primarily it behooved them to make good their escape; for the Russians might return at any moment, and, finding them gone from the hut, set afoot a search, which, so long as they remained so near at hand, could not fail to result in their recapture.

With the possibility of such an encounter, they decided not to risk going back through the bottoms, but since the skiff that they had used the night before was close at hand, to take it, and row across the river.

Quickly they launched it, therefore, and Grail, who took the oars, forgot, under the desire for speed, how stiff and sore his arms were.

As he thought of what might have happened to Colonel Vedant while he lay a prisoner—nay, more, of what might have happened to Meredith, recalling Simmons' interrupted disclosure—he set his teeth in grim determination, and pulled away so furiously that Cato was constrained to protest.

"Here, captain," he urged, "you'll wind yourself before we are halfway across. Take it easier."

But Grail only shook his head, and dug at the water harder than ever. Nevertheless, the swift, eddying current of the river is a thing to test the mettle of any rower, and, despite all that Grail could do, the landing that they finally effected was far downstream.

A passing trolley car, however, afforded them quick means of returning to the city, and, boarding it, they rode until Grail sighted the signboard of a public telephone station, and leaped off to call up with fast-beating heart the home of Mrs. Schilder.

The voice of the French maid answered, and as she repeated his name it seemed to him that there was a distinct flutter of surprise in her tone.

However, he was too absorbed to pay any heed to that. "Is Miss Vedant there?" he inquired breathlessly.

"Mees Vedant? No." Grail's heart seemed to stop beating in the pause. "She and madame 'ave just gone out in ze automobile."

He drew a long breath, and the icy hand which seemed to have been clutching at his throat relaxed. His fears and misgivings, then, in regard to Meredith had all been in vain; she was safe.

What he would have thought if he had known that Marie lied when she said that Meredith was not in, and that immediately on leaving the phone Marie hastened wide-eyed to her mistress, is another question.

Also, he might have indulged in some reflection, if he had known that immediately on receiving the maid's news, Mrs. Schilder herself hurried to the instrument and called up a number not listed in the book, but recorded at the office as belonging to Dabney.

Ignorant of all this, he went out almost buoyantly to rejoin Cato, and catch the next car headed for town. They had to wait a little for it to come along; so, with one thing and another, it was three-quarters of an hour before they arrived at the fort.

The evening had settled down early with a lowering sky, from which fell every now and then a spatter of raindrops, and the thunder was growling sullenly away in the distance; so, although it was still hardly sunset, darkness had practically fallen, and the sentinel at first failed to recognize them as, muddy and bedraggled, they approached the entrance.

At the sound of Grail's voice, however, he stared in incredulous surprise, and seemed about to say something; then recovered himself and gave the salute.

"There was a note came for you, sir," he stammered, "just about five minutes ago; but I didn't know if—didn't know when you were coming back, so I told the boy to take it over to the guardhouse."

"Thank you," replied the adjutant, and, stopping on his way to his quarters, possessed himself of the missive.

It was slightly damp to the touch, he noticed, but he thought nothing of that on account of the rainy evening. Tearing it open, and holding it up to the light when he reached his rooms, he pursed his lips as he read:

"DEAR GRAIL: I am dictating this to you at Schilder's office, where I have just received some astounding information which completely exonerates you from the unjust suspicions some of us have entertained toward you, and also points the way toward the speedy recovery of Colonel Vedant.

"Should you return to the post before eight o'clock, will you not accept our apologies, and come at once to Mr. Schilder's residence to join the officers in a conference we are holding there, to decide on how best to use the intelligence at hand to Vedant's advantage? Faithfully yours, APPLEBY."

Grail studied the letter. There seemed no reason to doubt the genuineness of the bold signature; it was Appleby's in every line and flourish. Neither could he question that the thing had been typed at Schilder's office. The chipped "m" and blurred "D" spoke for themselves.

Then he smelled and tasted of the paper on which it was written, but an incipient head cold, as a result of his night spent out on the bottoms, had somewhat blunted those senses, and he could not be sure of the results. The letter seemed, on the face of it, to be straight.

Still, to make certain, he called in his "striker," and asked if he knew where Major Appleby could be found.

"I understand, sir," said the man, "that he and all the other officers at liberty have gone out to Mr. Schilder's."

Grail turned to Cato. "That seems to settle it," he announced. "As soon as we can get brushed up a bit, we'll call a taxi and be off."

TO BE CONTINUED.

EXCEEDINGLY CAUTIOUS.

A gentleman once told a strange story, one that, like so many other true stories, was difficult to believe.

His auditors showed by their manners that they doubted, and so he appealed to another gentleman who had been present at the time to confirm the truth of his statement.

To his amazement, this man replied stiffly, and said:

"I regret that I do not remember the circumstances to which you allude."

The next day both these persons met, and the first gentleman said:

"But can't you really remember those extraordinary circumstances?"

"Oh, yes," replied the second.

"Then why the dickens did you say you didn't, when I asked you about them before?" inquired Mr. One indignantly.

"Ah," replied Mr. Two. "I saw that the company all of them took you for a liar, and I wasn't going to be taken for another!"

LOST AMONG THE ALLIGATORS.

Many years ago I was journeying by steamboat up one of the many bayous or creeks in the southern part of the State of Louisiana.

In the course of the morning the steamboat drew up at a wooding station to take in a supply of fuel, and, led by curiosity, I went ashore with a lad about my own age.

Growing tired of watching the negroes carrying the split wood on board, we yielded to the temptation to venture a little way into the forest.

A squirrel crossed our path. We gave chase, and the frisky little animal led us on till we found ourselves out of hearing of the hissing of the steam and the voices of the negroes at the woodpile.

Suddenly a bell rang; this we knew to be the signal for the steamer's departure, and were horrified to note how faint and far-off the sound appeared. However, shouting at the top of our voices, we turned back.

Through brambles and briers, thorns and thickets, climbing over fallen logs and splashing through marshy places, we scrambled and leaped.

Then we distinctly heard the coughing of the steam and the dash of the paddle wheels. The boat had started! The sound grew more indistinct, and our hearts sank as we heard them rapidly die away in the distance.

We thought it would be an easy thing to find the river; yet our efforts were utterly in vain.

After a time, no river appearing, we realized the fact that we were lost!

An hour or two passed, and we became sensible of the pangs of hunger. We searched our pockets, and discovered that one biscuit was our entire stock of provisions. This we divided and gloomily ate.

An incident now occurred which showed that our position had its positive dangers. A fallen tree lay before us.

Upon mounting the log, I espied, coiled in many folds, with its rattle erect in the center, a huge rattlesnake.

Just as I was about to leap down, my eye caught its villainous glance. Fortunately I knew enough of serpent lore to recognize this formidable enemy, and, with a shout and gesture, prevented my companion climbing the log.

Nor were we a moment too soon. The creature had evidently observed us, for, as we fled, we heard his warning rattle, and momentarily expected him to spring over the log, in pursuit.

As the sun drew westward, we busied ourselves with picking out a tree suitable for camping purposes.

I helped my companion to mount one, which was thick and bushy, in the branches of which he soon lay down.

I stayed below to watch for a last chance. It seemed a useless thing to do; yet, though hoarse with shouting, I once more lifted up my voice.

Was it a fancy that there was a reply? We could not be mistaken, for both of us heard a faint, far-off response.

We waited with intense anxiety the approach of the stranger.

At length a gun barrel emerged from a great bank of rushes, followed by a rough, hunter-looking man.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"We came ashore from the *Abeille* at the wooding station, and have lost our way."

"Whew!" he whistled, and rested on his gun; then scanned us both narrowly, for by this time my companion had slidden down from his post among the branches.

"Guess you had better come with me," he said; and, shouldering his rifle, he turned and pushed his way through the reeds.

Soon we saw through the branches the glitter of water, and came out upon the bank of a river, smaller than that up which we had passed in the steamboat in the morning.

Here, concealed in the rushes, was a canoe, which he quickly launched, swinging the head round to where we were standing.

Without speaking, he motioned us to get into the frail craft, then followed himself, laying down his gun and taking up a paddle. With a few strokes he drove the canoe out into mid-channel.

Very soon the night fell, and the fireflies darted among the bushes on the shore. We now heard the barking of dogs, deep-toned and long-continued.

Ten minutes more and the canoe was laid alongside a shelving bank, some five or six feet high. Our boatman, quickly leaping ashore, fastened the chain of the canoe to a stump near the water's edge, and bade us disembark.

We followed our protector as best we could in spite of the growing darkness, till, after traveling a few hundred yards, as far as one might judge in such a blind journey, we halted before a dimly visible log house.

The man unfastened the door, whereupon two huge deerhounds leaped out, frisking and barking, and, in their canine fashion, expressing the height of joy upon the return of their master.

Upon perceiving us, they showed signs, lively and unpleasant, of doubt and animosity, till they were roared down by the deep voice of our conductor.

A match was struck and a pine knot kindled. Heaping some dry wood upon the hearth, the hunter speedily had a blazing fire, whose ruddy glow showed up distinctly the rough interior of the house.

One of the first acts of our protector was to unroll a bundle from the corner and spread upon the floor a buffalo robe, upon which he bade me sit.

From the blazing fire he lit a rude lamp, which he hung upon the roof. Then he produced his iron pot, and sharpening his knife, with the pot in one hand and the knife in the other, went out into the darkness.

He soon returned with water from the river in the pot, and in his hand a piece of deer meat.

The pot was set upon the fire; the meat, cut into pieces and powdered with salt, put into it, and a handful of meal added, making a savory compound, which to us hungry boys seemed a delicious supper.

The serving of the meal was primitive. There was but one plate in the establishment; this the owner relinquished to his visitors, after having heaped it with smoking food, himself feeding leisurely from the pot.

We learned that our entertainer was an Englishman, who, in consequence of liberal views on poaching matters, had thought it more prudent to put the broad Atlantic between himself and his native village.

Here, deep in the backwoods, he lived a Robinson Crusoe kind of life, miles away from human habitation, supporting himself with his gun.

During the course of the evening we had been conscious of a growing babel of sounds, which arose on all sides in the great, dark, outside world, and which deepened in intensity as the night wore on.

Every now and then a hoarse bellow as of some mammoth bull that, slumbering, had been awakened by intolerable agony, came from the alligators that abounded in the surrounding swamp.

We had noticed that the door of the hut was a crazy concern, loosely hasped, and with an unfastened padlock on the outside. Inside, its only protection was a wooden bar, which shot so smoothly in its grooves as to suggest that a strong-snouted animal could easily nose the door off its hinges.

Upon communicating our fears to our host, we produced upon his grim visage the nearest approach to a smile that we had yet observed.

He seemed entirely at his ease.

He had strange tales, such as that one day he came home and found an old alligator asleep on his hearth; how that rattlesnakes had frequently crept in through the interstices of the logs; and how that almost every evening after dusk, at certain times of the year, wolves prowled around.

Then our protector informed us that we must be stirring with the dawn. He would take us in his canoe a distance of ten miles, whence, by crossing a narrow tongue of land, we might reach a steamboat landing.

With lively interest we watched his preparations for the night. He tried the wooden bar placed across the doorway. The logs were put together on the hearth. He then bade us wrap ourselves as well as we could in our buffalo robe; put out the lamp, and then lay full length on the floor, near the hearth, and was soon fast asleep.

Wearied as I was, I could not sleep. The external noises grew louder and louder. The alligators waddled up and down the acclivity upon which the house stood.

At one time no fewer than four of these ugly reptiles were prowling around our little sanctuary.

Meantime, our host had fallen into the profoundest of slumbers, the audible proofs of which had in them some obscure consolation, for I could not but reason that a man who could sleep under such circumstances, and sleep so soundly, could not but be assured that there was no real ground for alarm.

So the event proved. Confused thoughts of rattlesnakes, alligators, wolves, steamboats that devoured, and rattlesnakes that coughed and paddled, clouded my brain until I fell off into an uneasy slumber, gradually deepening into utter unconsciousness.

When we awoke our host was standing in the open doorway, drying himself with a strip of canvas, after his matutinal wash in the river.

He had put a can of water over the fire, and, bruising some coffee berries between two stones, he made us a not unacceptable beverage. Biscuits, coffee—without either sugar or milk—and the considerate relics in the iron pot from his last night's supper, made our breakfast.

We were soon on board the canoe, and were rapidly drifting downstream. The distance was quickly accomplished, and connection with civilization rapidly made; but I shall never forget that night spent among the alligators.

A NEW MOSSUITO TRAP.

He had the appearance of having traveled a good deal and was very talkative.

I incidentally touched upon the subject of mosquitoes.

"Mosquitoes!" he said; "why, my dear sir, up the Kongo I've seen them as big as bumblebees. One night, I remember particularly, they were out on the warpath, seeking whom they might devour, and were so outrageously lost to all sense of respect for me, that I was compelled to take refuge under the mosquito bar or curtain, although it was only just after dinner time and I wasn't a bit sleepy. There were two candles burning on the table, so that I could see pretty clearly through the thin muslin bar, and by and by I noticed one of the indefatigable gray cusses, in prospecting around, had discovered a hole about the size of a shilling in the bar. He hummed joyously and then sailed away and triumphantly broke the news to all his friends and relatives, and in five minutes the whole community had clustered round the hole. They marched in silently and formed up in battalions, awaiting the signal to fall to. I had been imitating the sailor's parrot by thinking a good deal, and superior intellect prevailed; for, as the last of the procession entered, I slipped out from underneath, took a cork from the brandy bottle, stopped up the hole, and slept outside. The way those penned-up insects raved and swore when they saw themselves circumvented was simply bloodcurdling. Fact, sir. What! going so soon? Well, I hope to meet you again some day. Good-by."

THE CAP FITTED ALL.

"You told me that you were going to a spiritualistic séance last week," said young Hepburn to his chum, McCabe. "Did you go?"

"Oh, yes," replied the other; "I went."

"Well," said his friend inquiringly, "anything out of the way happen?"

"Well, rather," said McCue. "We had spirit rapping and table moving and other things, besides, and the whole affair went off splendidly until the medium went into a trance, and then announced that he was the spirit of a man who had had his umbrella stolen, and that the thief was in the room."

"And what happened then?" queried Hepburn.

"Well," replied his chum, "the whole party made a dash for the door, and I was afraid that if I stayed behind I might be taken for the thief, so I retreated with the rest."

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

Forks Save Keeper Clawed by Lion.

Attendants armed with pitchforks saved the life of Carl Wilson, an animal tamer, when Prince, a Nubian lion owned by the Levitt & Meyerholz circus, leaped at him at he was putting the beast through its paces at Jersey City.

Wilson was rehearsing four lions when Prince became enraged. As the trainer advanced to the corner of the cage where it crouched, the beast sprang, Wilson fell backward, and the lion clawed his face and tore his arm.

The lion was growling over the prostrate trainer, when attendants, standing outside of the bars, prodded the animal with long-handled forks. Prince turned on them, giving Wilson opportunity to crawl to a door on the opposite side of the cage. He was taken to the Jersey City Hospital.

Prince has a reputation as a bad lion. Six other trainers have met with more or less serious injuries at his teeth and claws.

Scottish Officers Make Ammunition.

One hundred members of the Glasgow Officers' Training Corps have begun a self-imposed task of making shells, in response to the appeal from Earl Kitchener for unlimited amounts of ammunition.

These volunteers belong to the best families of Glasgow, and most of them will go to the shell factory in their own automobiles. They have undertaken to work six-hour shifts after a preliminary course of training.

Hamilton's Oath Sold.

The original oath taken by Alexander Hamilton on his admission to practice as attorney and counselor in the supreme court and as solicitor and counselor in the court of chancery in New York, a one-page folio, dated Albany, July 12, 1783, brought the top price at the opening session of the sale at the Anderson Galleries of Part V. of the library of the late Adrian H. Joline, of New York. George D. Smith paid $125 for the document.

The same buyer gave $100 for the original manuscript petition of Colonel John Brown to "Horatio Gates, in the Army of the United States of America, commanding at Albany," requiring General Arnold's arrest on thirteen charges. Mr. Smith also gave sixty dollars for a four-page letter written by Washington Irving.

Auto Puts Engine Out by a Blow.

A great, overgrown Erie express train near the Garfield, N. J., railroad crossing struck a poor, little, aluminum-bodied automobile with all its might—and the Erie locomotive was put out of business and had to be hauled back to the repair shops.

That was all there was to this New Jersey incident, except for the fact that two men who were seated in the automobile don't know just how they escaped injury.

Antonio Parapeto, of Monroe Street, Garfield, N. J., and John Russo, 430 Midland Avenue, also of Garfield, climbed into the touring car "to take a little spin." While approaching the Erie Railroad crossing at Garfield, the autoists failed to see No. 9 Erie Express, bound for Chicago, until they were only thirty feet from the tracks. Both men jumped.

The automobile went ahead and was smashed to splinters.

The locomotive came to a halt very soon. The metal work of the automobile had cut a steam pipe near the locomotive's pilot and rendered it helpless. Traffic on the line was tied up for an hour.

Parisians Lionize Pau.

An incident in Paris illustrates the popular regard for General Pau, who has been spending some time in that city since returning from his political mission to Petrograd and the Balkan capitals. Persons who saw the general enter the Red Cross branch in the Place Madeleine, waited in the street to see him come out. A crowd soon collected. A young girl borrowed a hat and quickly collected enough money in the crowd to buy for the general a huge bouquet of red, white, and blue flowers.

General Pau appeared to be deeply moved on receiving the flowers, and kissed the girl. The crowd cheered him, and as he drove off in his motor car he responded by shouting: "Vive la France!"

Husband Rued His Bargain.

Belmar, N. J., women want to know the name of the wife who obtained from her husband funds for a new Easter bonnet and two dollars, besides, as a church contribution.

Women of one of the borough's church societies each undertook to earn a dollar. They were to tell how they made it. Some baked cakes and one earned her share by deciphering a tombstone. The prize went to the woman who bargained with her husband for a dollar to trim her own Easter hat.

The husband gave her a dollar not to wear the hat and bought her a new hat besides.

Girl Arrests Hat Critics.

Miss Hannah Goldstein, of 1841 Prospect Place, East New York, chased two young men whom she accused of criticizing her hat into a candy store near her home, and there, after her screams had brought a crowd, exercised the right of any citizen to make arrests.

She took both into custody with the support of the onlookers, and escorted them to the Brownsville station, where they were booked on a charge of disorderly conduct.

The prisoners said they were Louis Markowitz, of 1589 Prospect Place, and Murray Zepkin, of 1858 Prospect Place.

Boy in Storage Three Days.

While the police of New York searched three days for James Kelly, the fourteen-year-old foster son of Mrs. Thomas Riley, of 158 Kent Street, Williamsburg, the youngster was locked in the subbasement of the building in which he lived. A workman for a storage ware-

house, which occupies the lower floors, found him unconscious.

A general alarm was sent out for the boy, and it was only by accident that the subbasement was opened, as goods had been placed there to remain several months.

At the Williamsburg Hospital, where the boy was revived, he said he went to the cellar to look for something, and found the door closed when he attempted to leave. He screamed and beat upon the walls until he became unconscious, he said. The vault was so far below the ground that his signals were unheard.

England Aids Belgians.

The English National Committee for the Relief of Belgium, organized as an auxiliary of the American Relief Fund, has made an excellent start. Although its appeal was issued a few days ago, $400,000 has already been subscribed.

Many Anglo-Americans have contributed, among them Countess Strafford, who sent $500. The success which the appeal has met is regarded in London as a wonderful tribute to the American organization.

Land French Boy's Valor.

Jacques Goujon, seventeen years old, has been mentioned in military orders, and a military medal has been given him. The youth killed two German sentinels, blew up, with the aid of bombs, two quick-firers of the enemy, was captured, but succeeded in escaping, carrying with him at the same time a machine gun of the Germans to the French lines. Later, during a German counter-attack, Goujon's right arm was blown off by a shell.

The military authorities at Lyons, Goujon's home city, had refused to accept him for military duty on account of his age. He went to Paris, where he was accepted because of his robust constitution.

Weds Invalid Rescuer.

Frank A. Seabert, seventy-seven, former superintendent of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad, has fulfilled what he declared was a debt of honor, when he married Miss Jeannette A. Thomas, forty-seven, the woman who saved his life recently. The ceremony occurred in the Pasadena Hospital, Pasadena, Cal.

Recently Miss Thomas threw herself upon a discharged employee of Seabert's in the Seabert mansion at Sierra Madre, who had attempted to kill her employer. She was shot in the spine, and physicians say she is paralyzed for life. For five years Miss Thomas had been Mr. Seabert's private secretary. The first Mrs. Seabert died four years ago.

Hen Hatches Turtle Brood.

Thomas Warren, a fox hunter, of Winsted, Conn., who recently found a nest of turtles' eggs in a field, placed them under a setting hen as an experiment. Seven of the eggs hatched. The hen's unusual offspring still nest among the feathers.

Gave Three Sons to France.

Three of the four sons of Charles Legrand, who entered the army, have been killed in action.

M. Legrand, who was formerly president of the chamber of commerce and was active in the project for exchanges of commercial students between Harvard University and the French Commercial University, has been notified that the third of his sons had been killed.

Use Name of Spy to Spy on Germans.

Anton Kuepferle, the American citizen of German birth who is held for trial in London on a charge of supplying Germany with information concerning the movements of English troops and ships, is said to have been the means of affording English detectives much inside information concerning the workings of the German spy system, with headquarters in Holland.

Kuepferle's arrest was kept a secret for nearly two months. Meantime it is reported that Scotland Yard men were using the prisoner's name as a means of communicating with German officials in Holland. In Kuepferle's baggage, sheets of paper used for invisible ink were found. Imitating Kuepferle's handwriting, the detectives were said to have written letters to German spy chiefs, between the lines of which they traced in invisible ink all sorts of questions asking further instructions. A rapid-fire correspondence is reported to have continued for many weeks.

The prisoner is charged with having visited many English and Irish ports to investigate shipping and report to Germany the movements of transports. Dublin, Liverpool, and Belfast are said to be centers where he was active. His capture took place the day following the declaration of the German submarine blockade, February 18th.

New Record Made by Wireless Phone.

A new distance record for wireless telephony was established when P. N. Place, superintendent of the Scranton division of the Lackawanna Railroad, spoke from Scranton, Pa., to Frank Gizek, superintendent of the Syracuse division, who was in Binghamton, N. Y. The messages traversed sixty-three miles through a mountainous country.

The achievement was made more notable by the fact that the messages exchanged were not brief greetings, but business communications, regarding the movement of trains. The Lackawanna trains between Scranton and Binghamton moved for several hours according to orders sent and received by the wireless telephone.

Every word transmitted by the wireless was heard distinctly, according to L. B. Foley, superintendent of telephone, telegraph, and wireless of the Lackawanna, who was in charge of the experiment. Mr. Foley was jubilant over the achievement. Experiments with wireless telegraph and telephone have been conducted by the Lackawanna under his direction for more than a year.

The more recently recorded demonstration previous to this was on February 9th last, when wireless-telephone conversations were carried on between the station at Binghamton and a moving train at Lounsberry, N. Y., twenty-six miles away. The immediate object of the Lackawanna's experimenters now is to increase the distance between a fixed station and a moving train to fifty miles, and that between two fixed stations to 150 miles, the distance between Hoboken and Scranton.

"I firmly believe," Mr. Foley said, "that we shall be talking from our station in Hoboken to our station in Scranton within the next three or four weeks."

The Lackawanna has constructed wireless stations at

Hoboken, Scranton, Binghamton, and Buffalo, and the ultimate object of its experiments is to have all points of the entire line between Hoboken and Buffalo in constant communication by wireless telephone. Simultaneously with the experiments in talking between fixed stations, progress is being made in the development of wireless telephony between a fixed station and a moving train. The experiments are being conducted by the Lackawanna's own men working independently of other agents. They use the Marconi receiver and a transmitter devised and constructed by themselves.

The Lackawanna began with experiments in wireless telegraphy from a moving train to a fixed station, and this was developed until the wireless-equipped train was always in communication with one of the fixed stations along the line, but with the advance of wireless telephony the development of this branch of communication was appreciated, and the efforts of the Lackawanna were bent to its perfection.

The value of wireless telephony has been proved on the occasion of every blizzard that has destroyed or impaired communication by wire along the railroad lines west of New York. In several instances the Lackawanna has succeeded in getting its trains in operation many hours ahead of other railroads because of the efficiency of its wireless.

Owes Life to Albert.

A wounded soldier in the Nantes Hospital tells how King Albert saved the life of a French officer. During a furious bayonet charge, a lieutenant ventured too far into the German lines, and was brought down by a rifle shot. He was grievously wounded, and evidently was thought by the Germans to be dead. The scene of the conflict shifted, and though the officer was very weak from loss of blood, he dragged himself out of the range of fire and then fainted.

On regaining consciousness, he saw two Belgian officers beside him, one with a lantern and the other dressing his wounds. They carried him to a motor car in the road. Arriving at the field hospital, near the general headquarters of the Belgian army, he got a better view of the two officers. One of them he recognized, saluted, and started to speak, but the king hushed him.

"All right, my brave hero," he said; "save your strength; the world can't afford to lose men like you."

Woman, 100, Leads in Dance; Blesses Sturdy Ancestors.

Doubtless, as she says, Mrs. Emily Mayhew Osborne's sturdy health heritage from New England ancestry has something to do with her century's lease on life. "I have lived to enjoy vigorous old age because of the clean, moral life of my forefathers," she said.

Nevertheless, when the orchestra tuned up for the one-hundredth-birthday celebration at 660 East 164th Street, New York recently, Mrs. Osborne led her fifteen descendants in a tango step. Four grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren joined in the applause which greeted this skillful attempt to reconcile Puritan ancestry with modern liberalism.

One hundred years rest lightly on the shoulders of this direct descendant of Thomas Mayhew, the first governor of Martha's Vineyard, who received a royal grant of Nantucket Island in 1641. She is hale and hearty, takes a long walk every day, and sews several hours at a stretch.

"Yes, I use glasses," commented Mrs. Osborne, anticipating the next question, "but understand, now, that I don't have to use them. They rest my eyes—that's all."

When she came to New York City from Columbia County, a woman of one and twenty, Manhattan Island above Fourteenth Street was mostly pasturage. "Yes. Broadway was nothing but a pathway for cattle, and Fourteenth Street was a little lane!" she exclaimed, in a flash of reminiscence.

After the death of her first husband, John Wilson Higgins, Mrs. Osborne married Samuel Osborne, who died many years ago. Of the eight children she has borne, two are living, Miss Emily Higgins and Mrs. Victor Smith.

Beginning in the afternoon, Mrs. Osborne's birthday party lasted into the evening, with friends and neighbors dropping in to leave flowers and extend congratulations.

Respirator Appeal Swamps British.

One day's appeal through the London press has given the English army all the respirators needed, and the press bureau issued the following notice:

"Thanks to the magnificent response already made to the appeal in the press for respirators for the troops, the war office is in a position to announce that no further gifts of respirators need be made."

"It looks," says *The Daily News*, "as though every woman in England who could find time for it made respirators. No doubt reports from soldiers who had suffered from fumes had a tremendous effect in prompting the instant answer to the appeal of the army, but the response was of such an extraordinary nature as to set up a record.

Great Waste in Potatoes.

Doctor Carl L. Alsberg, chief of the bureau of chemistry in the department of agriculture, said, in a talk to the New York Society of Chemical Industry at Rumford Hall, 50 East Forty-first Street, New York, that millions of dollars' worth of potatoes and grain were destroyed by excessive moisture in this country every year, when they could be utilized for making alcohol and other purposes.

The United States, he said, had relied on Germany for a supply of potato dextrin used as an adhesive, when it could easily be obtained here by simple processes from the potatoes which are annually allowed to rot in the Pacific coast States.

America Leader in Tobacco Trade.

The United States holds first rank among the nations of the world as producer, exporter, importer, and consumer of tobacco. Our production of leaf of all sorts averages somewhat more than 1,000,000,000 pounds a year, having a value to the producers of about $100,000,000.

An enormous quantity is exported—considerably more than a third of the production in normal years—and the sales of tobacco abroad are excelled by only seven other products. They exceed in value such items as cotton manufactures, electrical machinery, paper and paper products, and leather and leather manufactures.

Taking the export figures of the department of commerce for the eight months ended with February this year, the exports of leaf tobacco amounted to 221,129,872 pounds, valued at $28,077,684, and of manufactured tobacco were valued at $4,209,054.

The dislocation of trade resulting from the war has had its effect on tobacco sales, however, as on most other businesses. Unmanufactured leaf has suffered most. It is practically impossible to ship leaf to some of the belligerents, while factories in the warring countries that are accessible are not taking their usual supply because of insufficient labor. Manufactured tobacco is holding its own, due to the increased demands from the Far East and Oceania. In the actual war zone the increased consumption by the men in the field is more than offset by the economies that must be practiced by non-combatants.

Oldest Circus Man Dead.

Charles H.—"Pop"—Baker, seventy-nine years old, known as the oldest circus man in the world, died recently at the county infirmary in Toledo, Ohio, from the infirmities of old age. Baker brought out George Primrose, the minstrel, and twelve famous side-show curiosities.

Baker was born in Buffalo. He was an intimate friend of President Cleveland. He was in the circus business fifty-nine years.

Triplets Ride in Baskets.

Doctor George G. Hartzel, of 1460 Bryant Avenue, and Doctor Edward C. Joyce, of 1926 Clinton Avenue, New York, took to Bellevue Hospital a set of triplets. The little ones were born to Mrs. D. C. Attridge, of 826 East 180th Street. Believing they would have better care in the hospital, the physicians carried the babies from The Bronx to Bellevue in a clothes basket in an automobile.

The three children, shortly after their birth, were christened Margaret, John, and Dominick. The father declared that if the triplets had been born in Ireland he would have been entitled to a queen's bounty of $2,500.

Tale of Two Sharks, One Caught by Tail.

Commodore Merrill B. Mills, of Detroit, has brought his yacht *Cynthia* to New York from Florida waters, and when he reached the Hotel Wolcott, his friends took it that the season down there was officially closed, though partisans of Doctor H. W. Lawton, whose exploits in the fishing line have often crept into print, insisted that this could not be said until the doctor arrived in New York in his palace-car automobile, an event which has not yet been chronicled. At the same time, the stories of the recent exploits of Commodore Mills that gained currency soon after his arrival indicated that he has had an unusually satisfactory season.

In the first place, there was the rumor that Commodore Mills had landed some of the biggest tarpon that have risen to cheer the visitor to Florida in many years; and the tales of his other catches would fill an aquarium—if the fish did not. But the story that went furthest was the tale of how Commodore Mills, just before giving the skipper of the *Cynthia* the word to "head her for the Hook," had cast a tarpon line overboard, and had hauled up, single-handed, a pair of life-sized sharks, one of them with the head of a man in its mouth.

The story of the catch, as it was given by a supposedly veracious person at the Wolcott—Commodore Mills not being then available—ran this way:

"The morning was uncomfortably hot, and the commodore, who had come to the conclusion that if he didn't hurry North, the hot season would get here before him. However, he decided to cast a line in the ocean for a farewell bit of sport, and the yacht being some distance from the coast at the time, she was hove to, and her owner cast a tarpon line over the taffrail.

"Immediately, it seemed, came a tug at it. The commodore began to play his catch as he would a tarpon, but the line did not behave in the same way. What was on the other end, just tugged, and before he could get a half hitch on a convenient cleat, the line had run out almost its full length.

"Then the yatchsman pulled and pulled, but the fish would not come any nearer. First one husky sailor after another was called to assist, but there was no result. Finally the commodore had an idea. Surely there could be nothing smaller than a whale on the end of that line—a remarkably stout one it was, by the way, as you will see. He was anxious to get it aboard his vessel, if possible.

"He decided there was only one way this might be accomplished. So he had the end run through the block on the end of one of the davits, and it was gradually worked in far enough to enable one end to be taken to the winch. Then the winch was worked just as if they were raising the anchor, only very slowly.

"The catch kept pulling, but it could not compete with machinery. In less than four minutes, those who were watching saw the head of a shark at the end of the line. Some twelve or fourteen feet back of this a tail was thrashing the water vigorously. It looked as if a twelve or fourteen-foot shark had been hooked.

"As the catch came nearer, to the surprise of all on board, there were two sharks, for a second had caught hold of the tail of the first. With boat hooks and strong ropes, the two were made fast and hauled over the side. When the fish were examined, the head of a man was found in the jaw of the shark that had taken the bait."

Inquiries brought out some slight revision of this story. It is true that Commodore Mills caught two sharks, one of them weighing 970 and the other 750 pounds, but it was affirmed that they were caught separately. As for the detail that one had a man's head in its mouth, it was learned that the big shark did fill that description, but only momentarily, when Commodore Mills had a sailor stick his head between the jaws of the fish. The mouth was so large that there was six inches to spare on every side. The shark was quite dead at the time.

With these slight corrections, said the authority, the story was true.

Students Needed to Fight Typhus.

Professor M. I. Pupin, the Servian consul general, through the New York Committee of Mercy, has issued an appeal to American college students who own or can operate an automobile, to join a volunteer corps to fight cholera and typhus, as well as to convey food to the civilians isolated from the food camps in Servia.

The Committee of Mercy has appropriated $10,000 for the equipment of a special sanitary camp for the college

men, in which they will be entirely protected from the dangers of infection.

Professor Pupin's intention is to form a Servian organization of college men similar to that now in France, and one that will relieve the suffering that is not caused by lack of food, but by the lack of families for carrying the food from the food camps to the isolated sections.

The Committee of Mercy asks that those who intend to aid the sanitary equipment of the college volunteers send contributions to August Belmont, treasurer of the committee, 200 Fifth Avenue, New York.

"Home-run" Baker Gets $10,000 Job.

"Home-run" Baker, who refused to play with the Athletics until Connie Mack gave him more money, and who recently signed to play with the Upland team of the Delaware County League, was recently engaged by John P. Crozer, of Upland, a wealthy farm owner, at a salary of $10,000 a year, to manage Mr. Crozer's extensive stock farms, according to information received from Harrisburg, Pa. Baker will prepare the Crozer prize stock for fairs and exhibits, and will seize the present opportunity, it is believed, to familiarize himself with a business that will bring him greater financial returns than baseball.

Connie Mack refused to comment on Baker's latest move other than to declare he had never said he intended to blacklist the famous third baseman. "I want to say, however," continued Mack, "that I never want to see Baker again. He has treated the club unfairly, and I have no time for a man who is unfair in his dealings.

"So far as preventing Baker from coming back to the Athletics is concerned, I have not that power. Our contract is mutual, and he can force me to take him, but my sincere hope is that he sticks to his word and remains away. A man who breaks his word once is likely to do it again, and once and for all, I don't want Baker on my club. We miss him greatly and want his services, but I prefer a losing club to having men whose words are unreliable."

United States Seed Wheat for Spain.

The Spanish government has announced its intention of purchasing a large quantity of American wheat for distribution among the Spanish agricultural syndicates for seeding. This information is contained in a report received by the state department from Carl Bailey Hurst, American consul general at Barcelona. Spanish experts regard American wheat as superior to other varieties.

Culebra New Gaillard Cut.

President Wilson has signed an executive order changing the name of Culebra Cut, in the Panama Canal, to Gaillard Cut, in honor of the late Colonel D. D. Gaillard, who died from disease contracted while a member of the Isthmian Canal Commission.

England Losing Great Pictures.

A committee of trustees of the English National Gallery appointed in 1911 to inquire into the retention of important pictures in England, has issued a blue book, in which the committee states that the exodus of pictures from private collections is proceeding at such a rate as to cause serious apprehension. Masterpieces of the greatest importance have gone either to the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin and the Metropolitan Museum, in New York, among public collections, or to private collections in the United States.

The committee recommends that the government be asked to increase the ordinary Parliamentary grant from five thousand pounds yearly to not less than twenty-five thousand pounds, or, alternatively, that the money be raised by taxing the proceeds of works of art sold at public auction and by appropriating death duties paid on works of art. It is further recommended that the trustees and director of the National Gallery shall approach owners of pictures which it may be desirable to secure for the nation and endeavor privately to obtain the first refusal.

The committee regards it as inadvisable to legislate on the lines of the Italian law for restriction or prohibition of export of works of art. It is also considered inadvisable to put an export duty on pictures or works of art.

An interesting proposal is that some form of order, or decoration, should be conferred on those who generously endow or augment national art collections.

Wages Rising in England.

War as a wage raiser has brought to a considerable proportion of the laboring classes in England some compensation for the increased cost of living. Social workers estimate that the increased cost of living averages at least ten per cent, while the average increase in wages is not over five per cent. The plentiful supply of overtime work available in most trades makes it easy for most workmen to more than even matters.

The upward tendency of the English workingman's wages has been very marked. According to the official board-of-trade reports, the increases granted during the month reached a total of nearly $365,000. The number of workpeople who shared the increases was 440,000.

Increased wages in some of the leading branches of industry are summed up briefly as follows:

Railwaymen—All-around increase of seventy-five cents a week.

Longshoremen—Increases varying from twenty-five cents to two dollars a week.

Policemen—War bonus of seventy-five cents a week upward.

Carpenters—War bonus of one dollar to one dollar and fifty cents a week.

General Laborers—Increase of seventy-five cents to one dollar and fifty cents a week.

Miners—Employers generally offer ten per-cent advance in pay; miners demand twenty per cent.

Postal Employees, Including Telephone and Telegraph Workers—Increase of one dollar a week has been demanded.

Gas Workers—Increases averaging one dollar a week.

Bakers—Increase of one dollar and twenty-five cents a week asked, but employers' offer of seventy-five cents accepted pending negotiations.

Textile Workers—Bonus for overtime work in factories doing work on army clothing.

Boot and Shoe Workers—War bonus of five to ten per cent granted in some places.

Coopersmiths—Average wage before war, nine dollars; now twelve dollars and fifty cents.

Clerks—Some increases; 180,000 grocers' assistants have

asked a readjustment of wages; similar movements pending in other branches.

Engineering and Building-trade Workers—Some sections have secured substantial increases.

The number of unemployed in Great Britain shows a large falling off.

Reform Ousts Tiny Cripple from Stand.

"Little Georgie," the tiny hunchback negro, who for nearly a score of years has had the privilege of conducting the bootblack stand in the basement of the war department, in Washington, D. C., has to move because of the reforms inaugurated by Colonel W. W. Harts, U. S. A., superintendent of public buildings and grounds. Georgie is heartbroken, but, with a catch in his high-pitched voice, he said:

"Well, I made out pretty well to stay as long as I did, but I can't see how my little bootblack stand here in the dark alcove bothered anybody very much!"

In addition to the stand, Georgie conducted a little store for the sale of sweets to the employees of the war department. He served also as guide to the interesting portions of the building and the various exhibits of uniforms and models of warships.

Weird Old Man of the Pine Mountains.

The railroad now building between Callaway, Ky., and Beattieville, Ky., will penetrate the wildest and remotest fastnesses of the Appalachian Highlands and open up to development the vast stores of coal, iron, and other minerals now buried in their recesses; but it will also destroy much of the glamour of romance and fable that has so long hung over and been associated with it.

In the past the mountain region of Kentucky has been a world unto itself, preserving, almost intact, the manners, customs, and characteristics of the early settlers of almost two centuries ago. Feuds have been handed down from father to son for three generations, after the manner of the Scotch Highlanders, and many strange superstitions, among others a belief in haunts, wizards, witches, and warlocks still hold in the bosoms of many of the mountain dwellers.

Wise men, seers, and hermits still hold forth among the Pine Mountains, and the greatest among these—and regarded by many as being able to peer into the beyond and read the future as an open book—is "Old Norrie Parysons," the wise man of Plinlimon's Heights, at the base of which the village of Calloway is located. His dwelling place is a large cave, fashioned by the hand of Nature, but it resembles not the cell of an anchorite, for it is fitted up comfortably, almost luxuriously.

Old Norrie is a man of remarkable and striking appearance. He is the product of the melting pot into which has been cast the blood of the Cymbrian harper, the Highland seer, and the Aztec priest; for his mother, an Indian princess, could trace her lineage back to the days of the Montezumas, when her ancestors, high priests of an ancient faith, possessed secular and ecclesiastical, temporal and sacerdotal authority over unnumbered millions. His father traced his ancestry back to Cadwallon, the last and greatest of the Cymbrian, or Welsh bards, whose only daughter married a celebrated Scotch warlock.

The hermit, seer, prophet, or whatever we may choose to call him, is no ignorant and uncultured boor. He is now old, almost beyond the memory of years, and his once raven hair is white as the driven snow, but his form is still erect, his step free, neither is his natural strength abated. His eyes are somewhat dimmed and bleared from much watching over midnight furnaces, and have the weird, pathetic look seen only in eyes that have gazed into mysteries unlawful for men to know; but still in their slumbrous depths can be discovered flashes of latent flame that, at times, seems to pierce into the most secret thoughts of the beholder.

Norrie's parents settled here and made their home in the cave now occupied by the son in the early part of the nineteenth century. Where they came from or their purpose in locating in these remote fastnesses was never known. That they were cultured and educated far above the condition in which they dwelt was apparent even to the few rustic mountaineers who resided in this vicinity. Their cave was furnished with almost Oriental splendor, and negro slaves waited upon and served them.

The son, a small boy when they made their advent here, was waited upon by a young negro boy who was deaf and dumb. About the year 1850 Norrie's parents died, and leaving the cave in charge of the deaf-and-dumb negro, he started forth upon his wanderings, rumor said, to add to the store of occult knowledge he had obtained from his parents, who had long been regarded by the simple rustics as possessing uncanny powers and holding communications with unhallowed spirits.

For more than thirty years he was a wanderer in the Orient, learning the wisdom of the East in the temples of India and Persia.

The cave contains strange reminders of his travels. Standing in one corner is an orrery such as, in the long ago, Chaldean sages studied the blazonry of the firmament in the Valley of the Euphrates. There is a furnace, crucibles, retorts, mathematical instruments, and astrolabe in juxtaposition with a Jacob's staff carved out of ebony wood and fashioned in the form of a serpent.

On a table lies the latest works on Christian Science, side by side with Egyptian manuscripts, written on papyrus, and tablets from Babylon and Nineveh carved with strange hieroglyphics, together with the Bible, the Talmud, and the Koran.

That he will prove the last hermit of Pine Mountain is probable, but in the meantime his vogue is immense and he is consulted by hundreds, who place implicit faith in his utterances.

Sees Wolverene Possibilities.

Speaking of cows, Bro. Gibson, a Michigan boomer, believes in the dairying possibilities and hog-raising future of the Wolverene State.

"Why," says John, "we have in our section eleven cheese factories and one hundred creameries. It is impossible to describe the grand future of our dairying interests. If all the cows in our State could be put into one cow, she could graze off the equator, while with her tail she could swish the icicles off the north pole. If all our hogs were turned into one hog, he could dig the Panama Canal with three roots and one grunt."

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Dated June 12th, 1915.
144—The Clew of the White Collar.

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